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Online Communication of the Hungarian National  
Gallery and the National Gallery Prague:  
The Case Study of the Two Visegrad Alliance Member  
Countries' National Galleries

Master's Thesis

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Hereby I declare that I worked out this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature, and I did not present it to obtain another academic degree.

*Tikhonova*

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Prague, 1 June 2023

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## **Abstrakt a klíčová slova**

Prezentace kulturního dědictví je ústřední úlohou muzea. Rostoucí komplexnost mediálních technologií umožnila muzeím prezentovat dědictví prostřednictvím online mediálních kanálů. Muzejní online strategie spojuje různé aktéry, zdroje a publikum. Online komunikace však představuje pro muzeum výzvu, jak zvládnout online prostředí, dynamické a otevřené, které se střetává s povahou organizační struktury muzea: institucionalizované, stabilní a omezené svými povinnostmi. Výzkum se zaměřuje na online komunikaci Maďarské národní galerie a Národní galerie v Praze. Cílem této práce je prozkoumat krajinu online strategie a online interakce mezi muzeem a uživatelem, kterou tyto dvě středoevropské galerie vyvinuly. Produkty online komunikace, webové stránky galerie a sociální média tvoří soubor dat pro tuto práci. Rozhovory se specialisty na online komunikaci galerií a zahraničními studenty v Maďarsku mi umožňují konfrontovat perspektivu designéra z první ruky a konečnou stránku komunikačního procesu. Metody textové analýzy obsahu webových stránek a obsahové analýzy textových dat webových stránek přináší pochopení narativů a témat, které se v komunikaci točí. V souladu s paradigmatem nové muzeologie se práce zabývá sděleními, interaktivitou a praktikami zapojení do online prezentace galerií a koreluje je s okolnostmi roku 2023 v rámci Visegrádské čtyřky. Rámec Visegrádské aliance poskytuje měřítko pro vztahování online narativů galerií k národním narativům jejich domovských zemí. Díky tomu práce získává vhled do řízení online komunikace a jejích účinků v Maďarské národní galerii a Národní galerii Praha.

### **Klíčová slova:**

Národní galerie; online strategie; online komunikace; návštěvníci muzejí; online zapojení veřejnosti; národní narativ

## **Abstract and keywords**

The presentation of heritage is a central role of a museum. The growing complexity of media technologies made it possible for museums to display heritage through online media channels. Museum online strategy unites various actors, sources, and audiences. However, online communication poses a challenge for a museum to manage the online environment, dynamic and open, that confronts the nature of museum's organizational structure: institutionalized, stable, and limited by its responsibilities. The focus of the research is on the online communication of the Hungarian National Gallery and the National Gallery Prague. This thesis aims to investigate the landscape of online strategy and museum-user online interaction developed by the two Central European galleries. The products of online communication, the gallery's website, and social media constitute the data set for the thesis. The interviews with the Galleries' online communications specialists and the international students in Hungary allow me to juxtapose the first-hand designer perspective and the end side of the communication process. The methods of the textual analysis of a website content and content analysis of the website textual data bring the understanding of the narratives and themes revolving in the communication. In line with the New Museology paradigm, the thesis addresses the messages, interactivity, and engagement practices of the Galleries' online presence and correlates them to the 2023 circumstances of the Visegrad Four Group. The framework of the Visegrad alliance provides a scale for relating the Galleries' online narratives to the national narratives of their home countries. As a result, the thesis gains insights into online communication management and its effects in the Hungarian National Gallery and the National Gallery Prague.

### **Keywords:**

National gallery; online strategy; online communication; museum audience; online engagement; national narrative

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## Introduction

This thesis aims to present the phenomenon of the two Central European national galleries' online communication. The thesis starts with an overview of the research background and state of the art of the field with regard to relevant theoretical concepts. Then I proceed to outline the methodology and case studies which include the National Gallery Prague and the Hungarian National Gallery, the countries being part of the Visegrad Four alliance. I place the case studies in the scope of Visegrad cooperation as the Group has been considered a prevailing contemporary cultural framework.<sup>1</sup> In the Introduction, I describe and problematize the phenomenon of museum online communication.

The museum is a heritage and memory institution, a public organization, and a heritage actor. Despite the type of content or specialization of a museum, it holds an active and performing role in the heritage sector: it creates, produces, educates, exhibits, and interacts. Graham Black states that a museum is expected to be engaging and open a dialogue with its audience. Because of the socio-economic shift that has been happening for 30 years, society is currently experiencing changes in its demographic, economic, and cultural backgrounds. These recent developments have altered the ways of acquiring knowledge and interacting with information. Regarding the role of the museum, in the present time, it is supposed not only to provide the content but to respond to these challenges by taking into account the trends in heritage management: e.g., participative visitor-oriented approach, engagement, interaction, social responsibility, and creative collaborations.<sup>2</sup> According to these tendencies, a museum transforms from a rigid heritage institution into a more dynamic and flexible organization and becomes ready for a dialogue with its audience.

The 'Information Age' equally impacted the museum industry and has been creating challenges for museums alongside the expanding implementation of gadgets into the everyday life of ordinary people. The online environment offered a space for museum communication with its growing complexity: from Web 1.0 one-to-many type of online interaction to Web 2.0 with its heterogeneous and multidimensional character. However, the development of museum communication started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The 19th-century phenomenon of the 'printed museum' marked the evolvement of museum communication to the channels of the written press. The process caused diverse contemplations: museum interaction with the public; image construction; heritage-building; knowledge transition; access and ownership of the information; valorization,

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<sup>1</sup> R. Fawn, *Visegrad: The Study and the Celebration, Europe-Asia Studies*, 2008, 60, pp. 677-688. <sup>2</sup> G. Black (ed.), *Museums and the Challenge of Change*, New York 2021.

and representation of museum and museum objects in the media.<sup>3</sup> The problematic issues had enhanced today when museum communication turned into an online space with the digital construction of communication. Moreover, the museum's online communication has become inextricable from the museum content and an exhibition as a central product of a museum. Thus, online communication became an essential part of museum presentation.

In the time of Web 2.0, user engagement is a core part of institutional online communication. Within its heterogeneous context, the aim now is not only to spread the message but to make sure it reaches the people. User feedback creates an instrument of self-evaluation. The human side of an institution can be revealed through online engagement: openness and responsiveness are the valued qualities. User engagement is the next level of online museum presentation. It takes more effort, but it opens wider possibilities for quality interaction between a museum and its audience. By opening online dialogue or polylogue, museums can earn better trust, attract and save the audience, and understand their position better. In the end, it shapes a more effective and profitable institution.<sup>4</sup>

But a museum cannot just go online. The institutions are usually highly-contextualized and depend on the kind of content they produce and can offer free access. Moreover, state museums are linked to power relations and the image that they create about nation-related issues and therefore have more rigid and controlling internal policies.<sup>5</sup> The online communication and PR strategy, thus, needs to navigate sensitive matters, inner policies, and state appropriation. The character of online communication itself has specificities. The representation of museums in online communication creates a number of places of meanings and abstractions from the museum's in-place content: e.g., an object, a physical space, and an exhibition narrative. The interaction between an exhibition manifesting through physical museum space, an object, and diverse online communication devices (e.g., a text, an image, a website design) and online sources (e.g., a website, blog, social media) impacts the construction of online strategy. The engagement strategies equally require accuracy and respect for the museum content and the institution itself. The questions arise from the phenomenon. What is the role of online media? How do they change the sense and understanding of a museum? How does a museum communicate itself online? How does the museum audience consume the content? Does a museum offer online interaction and how does the audience engage with it? The online communication is shaped by museums themselves, offline

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<sup>3</sup> C. Georgel, *The Museum as Metaphor in Nineteenth-Century France*, in "Museum Culture. Histories, Discourses, Spectacles", 1994, pp. 113-123.

<sup>4</sup> R. Fernandez-Hernandez, T. Vacas-Guerrero, *Online reputation and user engagement as strategic resources of museums*, in "Museum Management and Curatorship", 2021, 36, pp. 553-568.

<sup>5</sup> N. Wančova, *Role nových médií v muzejní prezentaci*, Prague 2021.

and online environment, and social, political, and cultural context. Currently, the museum scene is exceptionally heterogeneous, which results in a complex and multilayered process of online communication and representation of museums.<sup>6</sup>

The museums as cultural heritage institutions operate in a context of the past they represent and in the current social, political, and cultural environment. The decision-making behind the exhibitions and narratives connects many actors: from curators to power authorities. The exhibitions manifest several ideas: opinions, an image intended to create and promote, and social or political messages.<sup>7</sup> The representation of an exhibition in a museum and online communication has multiple dimensions. An exhibition object exists in at least two places of meaning: a physical space of an exhibition and a metaphysical space of online communication. The narrative and meanings of an exhibition and an object as a part of it transfer to online space and becomes multiplied due to online technical possibilities. What does a museum say to the visitor, and who shapes the interaction? Online communication allows a museum not only to post but to spread the message to a higher degree. User engagement brings the connection to the audience.

Overall, museum online communication unites various actors, sources, information channels, and audiences and shapes the online museum presence. The museums use online communication with various aims: e.g., to promote, attract the visitors, educate and create access to a part of their digitized content. The line between the functions of online museum communication is blurred: is it an educational source, a marketing and promotion tool, a platform for discussion, or an engagement instrument? With the development of Web 2.0. it gains further complexity by involving not only the process of sharing the information but also the interactive and engaging character of the present-time online sources.

The process of museum communication can be divided into 3 levels of its operation: the level of design and encoding of messages; the level of content consumption and discussion; the interactive level of user engagement. Moreover, as in any communicative act, there are two actors involved: a sender and a receiver, a museum and its audience. However, the phenomenon of user-generated content alters this scheme where a user can engage with the construction of the discourse.<sup>8</sup>

The focus of the research regards the intertwisting character of a relationship between the focal points: online communication and consumption of the content in an online environment, and

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<sup>6</sup> K. Charizopoulou, M. Hagedorn-Saupe, *D6.1 Access, Participation, Learning: Digital strategies for audience engagement with cultural heritage in museums and libraries*, RICHES Project 2016.

<sup>7</sup> A. Desvallées, F. Mairesse, *Key concepts of Museology*, Paris 2010.

<sup>8</sup> S.T. Gronemann, *Mediated Co-construction of Museums and Audiences on Facebook*, in "Museum Management and Curatorship", 2015, 30, pp. 174-190.

museum online engagement with the users. The thesis is aimed to present and analyze the landscape of online communication and museum-user interaction created by the National Gallery Prague and the Hungarian National Gallery from the perspective of both a designer and a user. Additionally, this thesis places the online communication of both Galleries into the context of the current environment of the Visegrad Four countries, taking the perspective on a national gallery as a mirror of a national narrative. Simon Knell first developed an idea that national galleries or museums can be used in the process of nation-building.<sup>9</sup> In this thesis I adhere to this concept that connects the presentation of art with the reinforcement of national identities.

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<sup>9</sup> S. Knell, *National Galleries: the Art of Making Nation*, New York 2016.

## **Online communication as a prominent field in contemporary museology: a review of a scholarly debate**

This research focuses on a phenomenon of museum online communication, its engaging elements and consumption. The aim of the research is to understand the online strategy design by the National Gallery Prague and the Hungarian National Gallery, their used engagement approaches, and the consumption by an English-speaking audience. In this literature overview, I address the recent studies in the fields of museum audience, museum engagement and museum online strategies to position my research within the existing secondary sources on the topic. The mainstream idea of the current museology in regard to online communication is that museums are expected to promote their content online and interact with their audience in the virtual realm. The studies that I addressed as secondary sources, support this development. In the literature review I endeavour to understand how this concept evolved in the scholarly debate and why they consider important for a museum to go online.

### **The changing scene of museum audiences**

The New Museology by Peter Vergo, 1989, has become a groundbreaking study for the field and founded a new scholarly paradigm. This is a concept that emerged as a response to the changing role and function of museums in society. It represents a shift away from traditional approaches to museum practice and embraces a more inclusive, participatory, and socially engaged model of museum work. The new museology movement emphasizes a broader understanding of museums as dynamic, interactive spaces that actively engage with their communities and address contemporary social issues. It advocates for museums to become catalysts for social change and cultural dialogue. Key principles of the new museology include visitor participation, community engagement, social relevance, cultural diversity and representation. The new museology has had a significant impact on museum practices worldwide, influencing the way museums conceive their roles, interact with audiences, and contribute to social and cultural development.<sup>10</sup>

The present-time museology's emphasis on participation and engagement with public has a close connection to the current character of museum audience. Museum as public bodies need to correspond to the social progress. Graham Black describes the inner societal changes and the development of the present world, especially digital technology, that synergistically influence the audience. The generational shift and increasing population diversity along with the digital

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<sup>10</sup> P. Vergo, *The New Museology*, (ed.), London 1989.

revolution create the challenge for museums to meet the expectations of public and present the product in a comprehensible manner, to speak to its audience.<sup>11</sup>

The current museum communication studies approach museum public as present and prospective museum visitors interacting with an institution via the communication channels in-space and online. The museum audience is seen as a central stakeholder for museum online communication in the volume edited by Kirsten Drotner and Kim Schröder.<sup>12</sup> But this definition of museum audience has some predecessors. Ruth Fernandez-Hernandez et al. regard the history of the audience studies: from the 1990's analyses of the visitor behavior to the present research in interaction with audience and engagement strategies, both in-space and online. Throughout the evolution of museum audience studies, the authors highlight the importance of the environment that museums exist in and the museum strategies that adapt to the new contexts.<sup>13</sup>

The present time is characterized by the digital turn and mass participation.<sup>14</sup> These changes reshape the experience of a museum visit and demand adjustments for both the museum experts and museum public, argues Simon Knell.<sup>15</sup> The influence of the societal and technological change on the museum professionals and visitors' interaction with the information, digital sources and online sources is outlined by Muller.<sup>16</sup> The researchers highlight the connection of museum engagement approaches to the change from passive to active audiences in public communication. Sonia Livingstone and Ranjana Das address the rise of the networked media that influence the relations between audiences, authors and users.<sup>17</sup>

The digital turn and the online space manifest through the phenomenon of Web 2.0. Its interoperable, user-centered and participative character requires the museum online communication to implement engaging strategies. However, Nina Simon draws attention to the conflictual relationship between a museum and a Web 2.0: the static, designed, and authoritative character of a museum controverts the dynamic and changing nature of Web 2.0 where the authority is granted to users by users.<sup>18</sup> The museum online communication is thus needs to

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<sup>11</sup> G. Black (ed.), *Museums and the Challenge of Change*.

<sup>12</sup> K. Drotner, K. C. Schröder (eds.), *Museum Communication and Social Media: The Connected Museum*, New York 2013.

<sup>13</sup> R. Fernandez-Hernandez, T. Vacas-Guerrero, *Online reputation and user engagement as strategic resources of museums*.

<sup>14</sup> G. Black (ed.), *Museums and the Challenge of Change*.

<sup>15</sup> S. J. Knell, *The shape of things to come: museums in the technological landscape*, in "Museum and society", 2003, 1, pp. 132-146.

<sup>16</sup> K. Muller, *Museums and virtuality*, in "Curator", 2003, 45, pp. 21-33.

<sup>17</sup> S. Livingstone, R. Das. *The End of Audiences? Theoretical Echoes of Reception amidst the Uncertainties of Use*, in J. Hartley, J. Burgess (eds.), *A Companion to New Media Dynamics*, Chichester 2012, pp. 104-121.

<sup>18</sup> N. Simon, *Discourse in the Blogosphere: What Museums Can Learn from Web 2.0*, in "Museums & Social Issues", 2007, 2, pp. 257-274.

navigate the heterogeneous Web 2.0 space while remain connected to an institutional communication strategy, designed and rigid.

According to Ruth Fernandez-Hernandez et al. the Internet and the Web 2.0. provided the instruments for museums to communicate, educate and interact with public.<sup>19</sup> Julian Ayeh et al. highlight the significance of online communities for shared communication.<sup>20</sup> The studies in the present field of museum audience, both in-space and online, point out the growing importance of public engagement through online instruments in order for a museum to secure its social role and remain a valuable and active public entity.

### **Co-creation concept**

The Co-creation concept (or the New value chain) is one of the key notions for the audience and engagement field. Joseph Pine and James Gilmore conceived the notion in 1998 in the context of the broader concept of Experience Economy. The commodification of economy and the digital transformations resulted in the consumption process where the emotional experience is the central selling factor. The Co-creation conceptualizes the co-producing role of a consumer within the engagement with a product.<sup>21</sup> Therefore the user and its demands take the imperative position in the marketing that incorporates active participation from a consumer through articulation their needs and the individual approach.

In the context of the Experience economy and Co-creation Nina Simon developed the Participatory Museum concept that is supposed to design visitor-oriented and engaging content. The author argued that the participatory visitor model offers “multi-directional content experiences” that include both the museum narratives and the personal perspectives and experiences of a visitor.<sup>22</sup> This work changed museum practices and spurred museums to reassess their approaches from the perspective of user experience and engagement that connect designers and consumers. The significance of this concept is that it turned museums in line with the economic development of Western society and the rules of the market. It become essential to compete, and to win now means to put a client, i.e., a visitor in the spotlight to respond to their expectations. This is why many scholars and museum professionals believe visitor engagement to be a newborn central museum practice and a way towards a successful future. In a changing society museums

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<sup>19</sup> R. Fernandez-Hernandez, T. Vacas-Guerrero, *Online reputation and user engagement as strategic resources of museums*.

<sup>20</sup> J. K. Ayeh, N. Au, *Do We Believe in TripAdvisor? Examining Credibility Perceptions and Online Travelers' Attitude Toward Using User-Generated Content*, in “Journal of Travel Research”, 2013, 52, pp. 437-452.

<sup>21</sup> J.B. Pine, J.H. Gilmore, *Welcome to the Experience Economy*, in “Harvard Business Review”, 1998, 76, pp. 97-105.

<sup>22</sup> N. Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/chapter1/>, 2013, [Accessed 09.06.2022].

can perform their mission and remain reliable only through constant dialogue with their audience. The Internet offers a reinforced virtual space for communication and interaction, where the co-creation reaches a new level of availability and proves to be not only expected but required from a museum.

### **Engagement strategies in museums**

The scholarly debate on visitor engagement in museums went through the transformation from the on-site engagement research to the studies focused on the online sphere. However, the studies on the in-space museum engagement approaches develop at the present time as well.

Recently Leila Jancovich attempted to define museum engagement as an active relationship between a museum and a visitor or user developing through a form of a dialogue. The research showed the remaining resistance of museums to the concept of participatory decision-making while being open to consumer public interaction with the museum content.<sup>23</sup>

Pille Runnell et al. regard the museum perspective on visitor engagement with digital instruments. It addresses the changes of museum practices and relationship between a cultural institution and public in the time of the digital turn. The authors argue that the application of digital technology in museums resulted in the growing concern about museum users, consumer practices and content design.<sup>24</sup>

Ruth Fernandez-Hernandez et al. asserts that the value of various experiences for different user segments both offline and online has been growing since the development of digital world and online communication. The museum engagement strategies now need to consider the diverse expectations, background, knowledge and motivations of museum visitors or users.<sup>25</sup> Online communication appears to be one of the instruments to diversify museum content and interaction with public.

Isabel Garcia Fernandez argues that museums become more engaging to comply with expectations and interest of their public and welcome the public feedback via open and online media channels. The clear museum public communication develops into growing loyalty, creation of the museum community and increase in new customers.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> L. Jancovich, *Breaking Down the Fourth Wall in Arts Management: The Implications of Engaging Users in Decision-Making*, in "International Journal of Arts Management", 2015, 18, pp. 14-28.

<sup>24</sup> P. Runnell, P. Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, *The Digital Turn: Users' Practices and Cultural Transformations*, New York 2013.

<sup>25</sup> R. Fernandez-Hernandez, T. Vacas-Guerrero, *Online reputation and user engagement as strategic resources of museums*.

<sup>26</sup> I.M. Garcia Fernandez, *The Role of Museums in Contemporary Society: Institutional Discourse or Participatory Museum*, in "Complutum", 2015, 26, pp. 39-47.



The studies dedicated to the field of museum online strategies regard specifically the museum approaches in the context of engagement, user-oriented and communicative requirements. These studies stand at the crossroads of museum audiences and engagement scholarly debates. They address mainly two online communication channels: museum websites and social media.

The number of studies engage with the evaluation of success of museum online platforms or websites. These studies not only contribute to an academic discussion but are frequently used as a museum management instrument. Elena Villaespesa conducted research on the Metropolitan Museum of Art website. The research indicated segmentation of the website users according to their demographics, education, interests, occupation, and motivation. The results argued that the understanding of users' diversity and varying needs have the positive impact on the design and evaluation of the website.<sup>27</sup> Katerina Kabassi makes a metanarrative on the studies about the museum websites evaluation: the research categorizes the experiments and methods.<sup>28</sup>

The studies of museum social media hold the big position in the museum online communication research. The corpus of studies addresses the museum online participation approached via social media. The study by MacArthur on the social media participation instruments regards social media as the way for museums to expand to the wider social group and to enhance community participation.<sup>29</sup> Angelina Russo et al. contributes to the argument of museum social media value for the community-building.<sup>30</sup> Sigurd Gronemann et al. approach Danish museums Facebook communication through the discourse co-construction approach. The authors claim that museums and users co-construct each other while interacting on social media. They develop an analytical model of social communication that includes genres, tones, mode of access and power positions. The results show that the museums and users tend to contribute to the discourse and remain within established power positions.<sup>31</sup>

Antonio Padilla-Melendez and Ana Rosa Del Aguila-Obra conducted research on the integration of social media into the museum online strategies and assessed its effectiveness. The study included 100 world's most visited museums social media and based on its online communication presents a research model connecting museum online communication channels that influence the online-value creation and contribute to the museum online presentation. The

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<sup>27</sup> E. Villaespesa, *Museum Collections and Online Users: Development of a Segmentation Model for the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, in "Visitor Studies", 2019, 22, pp. 233-252.

<sup>28</sup> K. Kabassi, *Evaluating websites of museums: State of the art*, in "Journal of Cultural Heritage", 2017, 24, pp. 184-196.

<sup>29</sup> M. MacArthur, *Can Museums Allow Online Users to Become Participants?*, in H. Din, P. Hecht (eds.), *The Digital Museum: A Think Guide*, Washington 2007, pp. 57-65.

<sup>30</sup> A. Russo, J. Watkins, *Participatory Communication with Social Media*, in "Curator: The Museum Journal", 2008, 51, pp. 21-31.

<sup>31</sup> S.T. Gronemann, *Mediated Co-construction of Museums and Audiences on Facebook*.

study argues for a co-creational approach in museum online strategy design articulating that the recurrent communication via social media contributes to the collaboration with public.<sup>32</sup>

Linds Lotina investigates the designer perspective on museum social media communication. The oral history methodology study conducts the interviews with Latvian museum professionals and highlighted the factors that contribute to the development, elaboration, and maintenance of social media. The conclusions conduct that the social media communication in the addressed museums depends on the museum professionals' personal beliefs in the effectiveness of social media and personal motivations.<sup>33</sup>

Ruth Fernandez-Hernandez et al. examine the impact of social media reviews on museum reputation. They claim that the trustworthy museum image in the social media, e.g., actively engaging in social media, replying to users, and the online reviews at TripAdvisor platform contribute to the visitor decision-making, expectations, and correlate to the increase in the amount of museum visits.<sup>34</sup>

The addressed scholarly studies debate the phenomenon of museum online communication. The researchers highlight the importance of museum engagement with public online. The factors that contribute to the phenomenon of the museum online strategy, communication and audience engagement are the recent societal change, digital revolution, shifts towards participatory and visitor-oriented approaches in museology. The studies present the value of museum online communication for the museum reputation, performance of its social and educational missions, and success evaluation. The museum online communication and engagement are the key elements of the present-time museum research and practices of museum management.

In this regard, this research contributes to the field by combining the analysis of the online communication presentation and consumption, and the English-speaking user engagement. In the analytical part, I focus on the whole production cycle of a national gallery's online strategy and aspire to evaluate its effects and the challenges. The appeal to the National Gallery Prague and the Hungarian National Gallery creates a case study of Central European national galleries, a section underrepresented in the current scholarly debate. In the following section, I present an overview of a research project.

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<sup>32</sup> A. Padilla-Melendez, A.R. Del Aguila-Obra, *Web and Social Media Usage by Museums: Online Value Creation*, in "International Journal of Information Management", 2013, 33, pp. 892-892.

<sup>33</sup> L. Lotina, *Reviewing Museum Participation in Online Channels in Latvia*, in "Museum Management and Curatorship", 2014, 29, pp. 280-292.

<sup>34</sup> R. Fernandez-Hernandez, T. Vacas-Guerrero, *Online reputation and user engagement as strategic resources of museums*.

### **In search of definitions: the core concepts of the study**

The phenomenon of museum online museum strategy and user engagement having the heterogeneous character and including different actors and communication channels requires a theoretical background that would support and offer a framework to rely on in the analysis of design and consumption of museum online strategy. In this part of the thesis I explain the key elements of the research that ensure its focus on a national gallery online presence: a museum and a gallery, online space, online communication strategy, museum audience, online participation and engagement.

#### **A museum and a national gallery**

The ideas about the museum have been changing since its development with the flow of history. An archival collecting organization in its nature has evolved into a public heritage institution. In the post-revolution France in the early 19th century the role of a museum was to store and preserve valuable objects. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) agreed to the following definition of a museum in 2007: “A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment”.<sup>35</sup> However, the museum definition has recently changed to include the notions of diversity, sustainability, and ethical communication. The vote to change the definition took place at the ICOM General Conference in Prague on 24 August 2022. The final version of the new definition incorporates more details on the mission of a museum. It highlights the public access and participation as core elements of a museum: “A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing”.<sup>36</sup>

The present-day museum is rather seen as a platform for laboratory creatorship and curatorship to represent the past, community, and identity. Museums as cultural heritage institutions create a link with the past and future to ensure the permanence of society as a self-constructing system.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *International Council of Museums Website* <https://icom.museum/en/> [Accessed 30 May 2022].

<sup>36</sup> *International Council of Museums Website* [Accessed 10 May 2023].

<sup>37</sup> A. Desvallées, *Key concepts of Museology*.

The concept of a gallery is quite similar to the concept of a museum. Initially in the late 18-early 19 century, these two heritage institutions were not differentiated and hold the function of storing and preserving the artifacts. The model of gallery as a fine arts museum emerged later and focused particularly on preserving, storing and exhibiting objects of art.<sup>38</sup> The national gallery holds the mission of engaging with national art. The two main goals of a national gallery are to educate the local community and to present the national art on a wider scale to the ‘other’ communities, the non-national audience. Both goals include process of presenting and communicating national art in the way that would contribute to the national identity-building.<sup>39</sup> The national gallery usually exists on a non-profit basis and receives funding from a state. Thus, the national gallery has the connection to current power-relations inside a state that can influence the decision-making and external communication of the gallery.

### **What is online?**

The concept of the online space is one of the central for this thesis. Definitions of ‘online’ address the technological perspective: the online means being connected to or available through a system, e.g., a computer, or telecommunications system.<sup>40</sup> The digital instruments construct the online space and maintain its functionality. In the present time, the online space exists in a framework of Web 2.0, a system of online sources, especially websites, that main features are interoperability, user-generated content and participatory culture.<sup>41</sup> The model of Web 2.0 offers the so-called ‘architecture of participation’ by O’Reilly that transfer the authority to the user to produce, curate and diffuse the content.<sup>42</sup> Web 2.0 developed along with shift towards participative, visitor-oriented and community-centered approached in heritage management, hence in museums as heritage institutions as well. The museums, including the state national galleries, now face the challenge to engage the audience at the same time with the challenge of being competitive in the wide information field that emerged within Web 2.0. The issue of museum online engagement combines both the world of Web 2.0 communication and the discourse that originates there and the need to interact with the audience, including the online audience as well.

The notion of discourse in the present-time humanities remains loosely defined and ambiguous. Discourse can be regarded from the perspective of language and grammar

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<sup>38</sup> A. Desvallées, *Key concepts of Museology*, cit., p. 23.

<sup>39</sup> E. Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, London 1992.

<sup>40</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary Website, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/online>, [Accessed 07.06.2022]

<sup>41</sup> C. Aced, *Web 2.0: the origin of the word that has changed the way we understand public relations*, in “Representing PR: Images, identities and innovations”, Barcelona 2013.

<sup>42</sup> N. Simon, *Discourse in the Blogosphere: What Museums Can Learn from Web 2.0*, in “Museums & Social Issues”, 2007, 2, pp. 257-274

constructions (Gee), set of knowledge about particular area from a particular perspective (Fairclough), power relations expressed through language (Foucault). For this thesis I attempt to apply a concept of discourse used in Critical discourse analysis. The concept allows the framework for approaching online discourse that emerge within the online communication of a national gallery. The Critical discourse analysis (CDA) addresses discourse in a socio-cultural context and incorporates three dimensions as laid by Zongjie Wu: “social practices, discursive practices (text production, distribution and consumption) and texts”.<sup>43</sup> In the CDA the discourse is approached as a manifestation of social practice that outlines the information, identity, and environment. It also indicates the systematic way of construction of communication through certain institutions controlling what can and cannot be said. These two levels are shaped through the forms of communication: written, oral, and visual. For the purposes of the research, the CDA concept of discourse appears to be beneficial while analyzing the texts in a national gallery’s online channels and connecting it to the social environment and national narratives. Despite in the analytical part I mostly refer to narrative rather than a discourse, this concept provides the necessary background to address online texts as a form of social and institutional practice.

Online discourse has its peculiarities compared to the traditional understating of discourse. It takes place online, in a digitally constructed environment. Unlike written texts or verbal communication, the discursive practices happening online, e.g., in social media, are asynchronous. Moreover, online discourse has the strong graphical side (illustrations, signs, emoticons) that are complemented with the highly visual nature of a national gallery’s online content. Because of the Web 2.0. development, online discourse is polyvocal and polylogal, including multiple people engaging in complex interactions with multiple actions happening simultaneously. The online discourse is also chaotical: the topics overlap in discussions, can have lengthy time gaps and be intermixed.<sup>44</sup> How do the National Gallery Prague and the Hungarian National Gallery construct the communication and engage the audience in such a heterogenous online scene?

### **Online communication strategy**

The museum online communication strategy is a material level of the museum online strategy construction. The development of museum online communication needs the approach of strategic management with the regard to the goals, target audience, techniques, forms of online communication and results management. The museum online communication design also depends

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<sup>43</sup> Z. Wu, S. Hou, *Heritage and Discourse*, in E. Waterton, S. Watson (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, London 2015, pp. 33-51.

<sup>44</sup> T. Beaulieu, S. Suprateek, *Analyzing Online Discourse: Some Theoretical Ideas and a Visualization Approach*, in “ICIS”, 2015.

on the technical capabilities and human resources involved in it. Apart from the strategic management, communication is also a form for a museum to express its education and exhibition functions.<sup>45</sup> When communication takes place online, the shape of the produced content changes and the decisions on what to communicate online depend on a museum, or as in the case of this thesis, on a national gallery and the power-relations that it is involved. But the communication is not only the act of creating the message: it is communicated to the receiver, the museum audience. The consumption of museum online communication and the interaction with users now hold a central place in the space of Web 2.0. The issues of how, where and with what result the messages are received and consumed are key for the effectiveness and competitiveness of museum online strategy.

### **National gallery online communication**

The character of the content highlights the peculiarity of the national gallery's online communication among the phenomenon of the museums' online strategies. The processes and nature of the state museums are similar: they have collections of objects stored, chosen by curators, and exhibited, they depend on state funding and usually present a part of national history. However, the content of national art galleries is highly visual. Images of paintings are easier to recreate online, they can transfer the message in them and would need fewer commentary efforts when designing the online content. They are also easier to disseminate and can be read by a person from any culture. The quality of understanding and interpretation may differ if a viewer does not have a connection to the original culture but it does not prevent the general understanding of a gallery's object – a painting. However, the correctness of online representation raises issues that concern the quality of digital reproduction of a painting: e.g., the color, the shape, the quality of a screen of a device, the online context it is placed, and many others. The easiness of distribution, comprehensiveness of the painting but at the same time the risk of altering its authenticity by digitization makes the galleries stand out when it comes to the phenomenon of museum online communication. The online strategies and engagement techniques require a special attention to the highly visual and meaningful content of national galleries.

### **Museum audience**

The notion of museum public regards the museum users – those, who consume or have consumed the museum products and used its services. On a wider scale, the museum public concept addresses the prospective museum users, the whole population referred by the institution. The notion of public is central for the museum definitions and museum activities that are designed for

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<sup>45</sup> A. Desvallées, *Key concepts of Museology*.

the public. The public can be distinguished on local and international. As in the case of a national gallery, this differentiation correlates to the gallery's orientation towards educating the locals and presenting the national art to a wider scene. From a narrower approach, the museum public can be seen as a community of people loyal to a museum or being represented in a museum. This concept is closer to a local dimension of museum public. The issue of community-building corresponds to the visitor-centered approach in museology and ensures the social and educational performance of a museum.

The online museum public, or, as referred in a context of Web 2.0, users, are an audience that the museum addresses online. Its geographical locations as well as cultural contexts are wider, than the in-space public of museum visitors. The position of the online museum public is more active as it can interact with a museum directly in the social media, more open to consumption of different museum information.

The societal changes that currently influence the present-time museum audience are important to understand for the phenomenon of museum visitor (user) engagement. During the last 3 decades, the social trends underwent a significant transformation. The demographic dominance of white-collar population, especially in European countries lead to the emergence of the new consumption style, when an individual is sophisticated, educated, and looking for experience rather than for just an information. Thus, museums started to be seen as leisure: expected to provide competing visitor-attraction experience. Information age and development of social media changed the pattern of information consumption and knowledge acquisition. The new social generations of Millennials and Gen Z that live in the age of the Internet expect to engage with the content and be the “pro-sumers”, participating in the content construction.<sup>46</sup>

The shifts in the character of current museum public creates a challenge of a museum to meet its expectations. The new museum audience deals with information in a new way, does not need linear and straight educational content and demands a museum to provoke interaction.<sup>47</sup> The stress on participation of museum audience online is even more enhanced by the nature of Web 2.0 space itself.

### **Online participation and engagement**

The changes in the society, the approaches to heritage and the online space can all be described as a shift from passive to active. The participative turn in heritage management takes an

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<sup>46</sup> G. Black (ed.), *Museums and the Challenge of Change*.

<sup>47</sup> G. Black (ed.), *Museums and the Challenge of Change*.

individual to an active position in decision-making.<sup>48</sup> In the context of museums, participation introduces the approach focused on interaction with museum object to let a visitor experience the theme and correspond to social changes in museum expectations. The interactive technologies in exhibitions proved to create brighter learning experience and enhance the results of a museum visit.<sup>49</sup> Hence, a museum needs to be engaging to actively interact with a visitor through a form of dialogue. The engagement not only improves the museum service but allows to increase consumer loyalty and study the consumer feedback. The engagement through developing loyalty and attracting new audience can create economic and social benefits for museums, improve the performance of its mission and form the community.<sup>50</sup>

Online engagement offers a technology to introduce the museum-user interaction in an online space. Graham Black referred to a present style of information management as to a “time when mass one-way communication has been replaced by mass participation”.<sup>51</sup> The process was influenced by the digital turn: the networking collaborative character of digital space and Web 2.0 hold the participation and user engagement at their core. The museum online engagement can be an important part of museum online strategy that would allow connecting with the audience, enlarging the access, and measuring performance of a museum.

The theoretical framework of the thesis includes the concepts of gallery, online space, online discourse and narrative, online communication strategy, museum audience, online participation and engagement. I relate these notions to the relationship between a national gallery’s online communication construction and its approaches to online engagement. The notions allow to concentrate on and address the phenomenon of a national gallery’s online communication.

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<sup>48</sup> R. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, London 2012, pp. 139-168.

<sup>49</sup> N. Wančova, *Role nových médií v muzejní prezentaci*, Prague 2021

<sup>50</sup> R. Fernandez-Hernandez, T. Vacas-Guerrero, *Online reputation and user engagement as strategic resources of museums*.

<sup>51</sup> G. Black (ed.), *Museums and the Challenge of Change*, cit. p. 69.



## **The long-developing relationship of museums and media from the print to the Web**

This section of the thesis presents an overview of the phenomenon of the development of the representation of museums in media to museums taking an active position and creating online strategies themselves. It consequently explores the background of the phenomenon of museum media communication, relevant history of media and related problematic issues.

### **Museum public relations**

This section introduces the museum as a communicating body. According to Harold Lasswell's model (1948), communication is an act of transferring information between one or several emitters and one or several receivers. The communication process in a museum can be reciprocal, involving interaction with the audience, or unilateral, as referred to transmission by Régis Debray. The history of museum communication starts with the simple transmission of the message with little interactive intentions in the second half of the 20th century. By the 1990s museums came to take the communicative responsibility. However, up to the present-day museum communication remains mostly unilateral and reveals a presentation of products: e.g., objects, exhibition, and research results.<sup>52</sup>

Online communication and PR pose a relatively new challenge for museums. With its many-to-many character of information spread, it creates a complex discursive network where a museum needs to participate to maintain its role and remain a significant public institution. However, the communication pattern that museum takes in Web 1.0. still keeps the unilateral nature. The museum website continues to be the main communication channel and the researchers keep on noticing a lack of interactivity.<sup>53</sup> Online communication allows museum creation of an additional place of meaning and presence. At the same time, it problematizes democratization, accessibility, communication construction and control, user engagement, and interaction.

The research focuses on museum online strategy and engagement. It regards the matter in an embracing analysis of the online communication design and user engagement approaches. The research project originates from the matter of representation of museums in media and the discourse that is produced by it. For the understanding of the research subject matter, the next section concentrates on the history and the background of the representation of museums in media. It would drive the comprehension of communication as a system of phenomena connected to particular contexts and altering over time.

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<sup>52</sup> A. Desvallées, *Key concepts of Museology*.

<sup>53</sup> P.F. Marty, *Museum websites and museum visitors: digital museum resources and their use* in "Museum Management and Curatorship", 2008, 23, pp. 81-99.

## Museum and printed media

The rise of printing technology started the development of media. Asa Briggs and Peter Burke argue that printing has to be regarded as a part of communication related to the oral, visual, written, and knowledge-transmission components. The complex nature of different forms of communications contributes to the public spheres.<sup>54</sup> The printed communication encouraged the expansion of the public sphere, global connections, and shifts in public knowledge and cultures. The process brought a concern on the relation of media to the society. With museums being central heritage and cultural institutions, the museum media presence presents an example of intertwining relations of media, culture, public knowledge, and information spread.

The pioneer attempts for the presentation of museums in media were initiated in 19th-century France with the phenomenon of the printed museum. In the 19th century museum communication appeared as a printed museum phenomenon and manifested through the channels of the written press. In the article *The Museum as Metaphor in Nineteenth-Century France* Chantal Georgel highlights the gradual development of museums in 19th century France from archival collections to a central memory institution with vivid organization and structure aimed to preserve and exhibit products of nature, science, and arts.<sup>55</sup> While the French revolution tractions became the drive towards conservation and the heritage was claimed to be national, hence the state collected it in museums, by the 19th-century museums evolved to exhibiting and organizing pieces into a coherent narrative. National heritage turned into a tool to avoid future ruptures and create a sense of unity and its growing importance enhanced museum communication development: as a political tool heritage needed to be spread amongst the public with the means of media. Furthermore, the social and scientific development of the era resulted in the start of the expansion of heritage and historical values and the institutionalization of history as a professional field. Museums, being memory institutions of 19th century, operated during the time when the first systematic attempts at historiography took place. Moreover, the 19th century demonstrated the decrease in the importance of universal values and social and political shifts towards particularism of countries, nations, and states. The transformation of universal references into specific and fragmented ones from a museological perspective highlighted the process of museum self-organization, creation of taxonomy, and adoption of analytical and critical approaches to structure the knowledge and choose the most appealing pieces. The construction of heritage through a museum space and communication started to take place. The multiplication of heritage domains,

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<sup>54</sup> A. Briggs, P. Burke, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, Cambridge 2009.

<sup>55</sup> C. Georgel, *The Museum as Metaphor in Nineteenth-Century France*.

the necessity to organize and present collections, and the omnipresence of museums made them one of the central institutions of the 19th century holding a symbolic value.

The printed museum phenomenon developed as an idea to offer access to museum objects to a wide public so that the readers would be able to combine their own printed collection of reproductions. These intentions were driven toward educational aspirations, the spread of knowledge, and moralization. Gradually the process of printed museum development indicated the rise of issues: self-construction of museum image, communication building, shaping of collections and correlation to exhibitions, creation of meanings, valorization, and authenticity of objects. The issues are still apparent today, as the museum media presence evolved from printed catalogs to a diverse contemporary media scene and online space.

The printed museum became an additional place of meaning in 19th-century France. The museums were able to create the discourse not only in the exhibition space and direct interaction with visitors but on a wider scale of their readers' audience. The reach of the museums was enhanced both geographically, to the distant locations, and socially, to the members of various social groups, from classes to small interest organizations. In the 19th-century France moralization was the major message of museum catalogs. The museums strived to spread morale among the readers, as morale was a major cultural aspiration of the time. With the help of images and accompanying texts the museum created a story on a chosen value (e.g., the family value illustrated by the painting "Rubens and His Wife Isabelle Brandt" told by the Munich Pinakothek).<sup>56</sup> The reproductions, language, and literary devices allowed the museum to construct communication and interpret an object of art in accordance with the desired goal.

The collection in the making process, referred to by Chantal Georgel, indicated the growing importance of the construction of discourse by museums, both in the exhibition and in the written press. With the constantly updated publications of museum journals and representation of ever-renewed images and information, the museum kept on steadily completing the printed collection. The construction of museum communication was focused on educational purposes and aimed to illustrate the boundless nature of the museum collection. The museum communication did not intend to interact and engage in a dialogue with the audience. The quantitative expansion of collection representation corresponds to the 19th-century encyclopedic abilities of museums. The museums strived to be inscribed into a wider knowledge field and to highlight their credibility.

Today the museums have diverse aspirations behind the media presence. We cannot say that online museum communication holds an encyclopedic character today. Rather, the museums

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<sup>56</sup> C. Georgel, *The Museum as Metaphor in Nineteenth-Century France*, cit.

in online communication tend to give an overview, present key elements of collections and exhibitions, and leave some places blank. The possible motivations could be the narrative structurization in order to avoid information overload. Furthermore, the museum websites currently inherited the function of the 'vitrine' in 19th-century museums and printed museums. For instance, the incomplete narrative causes curiosity and serves to promote the exhibition and invite an online user to an exhibition. However, the chosen key elements are often sufficient to highlight the must-to-know object and still provide educational content.

The printed museum communication involved no interaction with the museum audience of the 19th century. The reasons are numerous: museums were focused on the diffusion of knowledge and education rather than discussion and interaction. Moreover, there were no instruments for the museum-user media interaction to appear: the communication channels were few and the information reach took a lot of time. The 19th century offered little space for museum-visitor interaction. However, an engagement technique started to develop at the time period. For instance, museums used to issue periodicals on a subscription basis. The periodicals were related to the museum collections and told the continuing story of the museum content united chronologically, thematically, and taxonomically. With time, a subscriber could collect the whole museum catalog. At the same time, the subscription would engage the audience: maintain its interest in a museum and keep it connected to an institution.

The phenomenon of the printed museum in the 19th-century France corresponded to the growing complexity of heritage construction. The heritage in museums started to be interpreted, converted into media communication, and attributed to values and messages. The printed museum became an instrument for the spread and communication of heritage.

### **Museums and digital mass media in the 20th century**

The rise of digital technology in the second half of the 20th century changed the ways institutions approach heritage. First, the development of digital memory instruments made space for the digitization of storages and collections. Digital archives are fragile and depend on technology, but they also make possible wider access that some of the heritage-sector actors refer to as democratization. Moreover, the 20th century became a time of the increase in the visibility of everyday life that originated in the photography and illustration rise as well as the advertisement development. This process influenced the museum's communication. Digital mass media gave it a new turn: naturally, in the period of evolving globalization, the communication channels became omnipresent and easily reachable, especially in the Western world. In this section, I regard the two

most spread types of digital mass media in the 20th century: radio and television in connection to the museum's media presence.

The next major shift after the 'printed museum' phenomenon occurred with the development of technology marked by photography in the second half of the 20th century. First, the tendency to reproduce objects of art in media turned to the global level: the museum catalogs and printed versions of paintings were known to the extent of the Occidental world. John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* investigated the photography and printed representation of art from the perspective of changes of reception that occur when a painting is being fragmented, placed in the context of a newspaper, pinned down the wall, or printed as a postcard and sent in an envelope. The surrounding context, both the one that produces information or just a place on the wall and the way the light reaches it, alters the perception of a painting. The high visibility enhances the concern for perception and authenticity. John Berger indicated the multiplication of spaces and meanings that create an environment of objects of art and paintings. The phenomenon developed as a consequence of technological progress and the wider availability of photography, printed press, and television.

Photography allowed the reproduction and dissemination of museum objects and collections in the printed press. Television, in its turn, became a mass communication channel where a museum could present itself with the production of the motion picture. The dynamic visual nature of television heterogenized the communication process as such and influenced the museum communication strategy along with a more general impact on the usage of digital tools in museums. Means of television and filmmaking enabled the recording of museum video material, more precise digitization of museum objects, and the creation of coherent digital narratives about the museums. The phenomenon of museum telecasting was not exactly a communication act but rather a presentation created with the television toolset. Despite the television came as a perfect medium of museum visual presentation because of the visual representative character of museum content, it had its drawbacks. The museums could not construct a full-scale first-person media communication as in-between actors would provide a space for it, e.g., a tv-channel or a video-recording company. The media engaging component also did not exist in this stage, except for a short shot with the museum's contacts at the end of the video material. The most spread examples of the television museum presence were either a TV program dedicated to a museum and its collection or a video series digitizing and storytelling a museum's content. The possibility to expand to the television communication was available for the major state museums of the Western countries. The cost and sophistication of video production created limits in the tv communication usage in the museums. But to the museum that managed to arrive at the television communication,

it opened wide accessibility and audience spread. For instance, when the BBC created a bi-monthly TV program devoted to the museums in the United Kingdom in 1952, the reach of the audience of the channel constituted 80% of the country's population. Around eight million people saw the program.<sup>57</sup> This reach was exceptional for the time, and despite little engagement and presumably little conversion to museum visits, the television communication enhanced the educational mission of museums and contributed to the spread of information about museums. From the perspective of educational value, television was a great enhancement for the museum not only because of the higher accessibility, but also due to the level of concentration on an object or theme, quality of information prepared by a team of experts, the controlled viewing, and the technical capabilities of a television camera that allowed the detailed elaboration of a museum object.<sup>58</sup>

Radio was the equally important media communication channel in the Western world of the 20th century, especially before the rise of television. But even after the appearance of television, the radio remained significant for the distant regions in the time of transition. Thus, the radio as a mass media ensured the reach of information to a wide audience. However, the sensory nature of the sound and its non-visual character limited the applicability of radio to the museum presentation goals. Moreover, the museum presentation had to adjust to two kinds of radio network programs: sponsored and produced by advertisers with the entertainment purpose or the sustaining programs created by the radio team on the funds received from the advertising. The latter had in many cases educational and informative character. The four types of radio presentations proved suitable for the museum content and goals: the talk, the interview, the radio documentary, and the radio discussion. All these formats provided the space for the museum content to be presented coherently and on the full scale. This type of programs fit the nature of the museum content. The aims of the museum radio programs were not only to educate but also to attract visitors. Therefore, local-oriented radio editions had more value than nationwide broadcasts. Museums created radio programs from time to time, but the occasions were so rare that they were celebrated in museum publications.<sup>59</sup> Thus, there were some cases of museum presentations through radio communication channels. Compared to television, the issue was rare due to the non-visual character and decrease in radio popularity in the second half of the 20th century. Nevertheless, museum radio presentations were as far from the act of communicating with the audience as the television ones.

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<sup>57</sup> P. Johnstone, *Museums and Television, an Account of a BBC Experiment*, in "Museum International", 1954, 7, pp. 268-273.

<sup>58</sup> H.D.m. Grier, *Television experiments in American Art Museums*, in "Museum International", 1949, 2, pp. 247-260.

<sup>59</sup> H.D. Brown, *Museums and Radio*, in "Museum International", 1949, 2, pp. 238-246.

Overall, the 20th-century museum media presence grew quantitatively and qualitatively: the amount of the museum media programs increased, the audience reach became largely wider and the technical capabilities allowed the presentation of detailed, precise, and quality museum content. The one-to-many character of the mass media channels did not provide space for the museum-audience engagement and direct interaction, hence, the museum media communication was focused on the educational values. Museum made some attempts to attract an audience, but the promotional possibilities of the 20th-century analog media remained little for the museums.

However, this period created a meaningful shift in the museum's media presence. First, the emerging technology itself significantly modified media communication. The rise of technology along with the strengthening of the middle class in the Western world influenced consumption and entertainment. The space for experiments drawn by digital media technology and the new way of acquiring and interacting with information ensured the emergence of new forms of media products. The opportunity to present itself in the media and the request of the audience for art, culture and educational content spurred the museums to participate in the new digital media communication. From the audience's perspective, the technology helped to raise awareness in society about museums and to understand museums' role and value in the community.<sup>60</sup> Thus, this period of the museum media presence created the basis for the more embracing and engaging museum media strategies.

### **Museum media presence in the time of the Internet**

Since the 1990's the process of museum communication has been expanding to the online world. The development of technology and communication approaches changed museum media strategies. From the presentative character of the communication in the analog media, the recent organizational media communication strategies have heterogeneous and embracing character: they concern all mass media channels, attempt to meet the needs of the target audience, and construct the self-aware communication, following the goals and implementing various presentation and engagement techniques.<sup>61</sup> The previous communication technologies seemed to be linear and straightforward. The World Wide Web technology provided the additional space for communication and the growing complexity and the participative character of its systems impact communication as such and museum communication in particular. Moreover, the current heritage scene became wider and increased the heterogeneity, which resulted in a complex and multilayered process of museum online communication presenting the heritage, considering the community,

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<sup>60</sup> B. Rasmussen, *The Twenty-Four-Inch Box in Your Living Room is Not a Museum, Early Experiments in Museum Television*, in "Journal of Museum Education", 44, 2019, pp. 379-390.

<sup>61</sup> M. Papa, *Organizational Communication: Perspectives and Trends*, Thousand Oaks 2007.

and holding the institutional and educative character. In the next section, I address the Internet development and the peculiarities of museum communication that emerged from the online media.

Web 1.0., also referred to as the read-only web, was the first generation of the online network. It provided an online place for businesses to present their information and for users to search and read it. Despite its simplicity as a system, it made a big shift in the data accessibility both for content producers and users. Moreover, it introduced a notion of the user, that will have an increasing impact on the communication approaches in the time of Web 2.0.

Websites were a manifestation of Web 1.0. In the 1994 appeared the first graphical browser Mosaic, which was based on the hypertext transfer protocol. It became a moment when the first museum websites occurred. Despite at the first stage, the web space capabilities to present museum identity seemed limited, the valorization of the Internet changed with time and museums started to create the websites. The first ones that presented themselves on the World Wide Web were the Louvre, the Prado, MoMA, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.<sup>62</sup> The major museums of the Western world were the first ones to capitalize on the opportunities of the Internet. The aim of a museum website was to highlight key data about an institution, to present the central product of a museum, the exhibitions that it offers, and to guide a visitor in order to make a museum look approachable, credible, and worth visiting. The edge lies between marketing aspirations and knowledge production.

At that time, the web museum started to be seen as a wholesome communication strategy making a contrast to the previous media by offering better visibility, lower cost of development, better relationship with the audience, and chances for the future economic benefits.<sup>63</sup> The differentiation of the museum's in-spaces communication with the public and the advantages opened by the online communication made the museums understand the value of the Internet for their media strategies. Exhibitions as a central museum product remained the most common way to interact with the audience offline. Additionally, the multimedia and interactive technologies created the channels for the museum to enhance the public communication and PR, attract visitors, spread the educational content, and improve the service by guiding the users through their website and introducing digitized collections.<sup>64</sup>

Web 2.0. is the second generation of the World Wide Web. At the heart of the shift that it introduced was the transition from one-to-many communication patterns to many-to-many

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<sup>62</sup> A. Levati, *#contemporaryart Social Media Communication of Contemporary Art Galleries and Museums in Milan*, 2019.

<sup>63</sup> A. Levati, *#contemporaryart Social Media Communication of Contemporary Art Galleries and Museums in Milan*. <sup>64</sup> A. Proença, M. Brito, *Using the Web to Give Life to Museums*, In D. Bearman, J. Trant (eds.), *Museums and the Web 1998: Proceedings*, Toronto 1998.



communication instruments. Darcy DiNucci came up with this term in 1999.<sup>65</sup> It allowed creating the discussion space with equal rights and opportunities for dialogue for both organizations and users.

The online space of Web 2.0. became multifaceted, dynamic, and extremely heterogeneous. Its key features are user-generated content, collaboration, sharing of information, and interoperability. These peculiarities had a major impact on how individuals and organizations store, process and operate the data as well as what is expected from an organization engaging online. The users now hold the central place: the information aimed at the users can receive fast feedback and be constantly reassessed by going through the process of encoding, decoding, interpretation, and transformation. The engagement strategies not only appeared but took the leading role in the communication of an organization, when the effectiveness is measured by the participation, and interaction with users. In the sphere of museums, the economic benefits of online communication became visible: museum websites and online media presence correlate to the growth of museum visits and convert into higher trust and user collaboration.<sup>66</sup> The museum communication in the time of Web 2.0. adopts an immersive museum environment, that incorporates the museum website, museum on-site service, and social media presence.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, the museum meets direct users' feedback on social media and instant critiques published in the third-party online media.

The web evolves quickly and developed interactive spaces. The first museum websites went through the transformation towards more interactive models and the museum online communication got complemented by social networks and blogs. The multiplicity of online channels that exponentially expanded the information field and enhanced data transmission. Blogs were among the early web 2.0 tools used by museums. They opened the space for debate and discussion between the audience and the institution. Blogs demonstrated the utility of museum-user online interaction by the possibility to address a user in a direct and different way compared to a stranded nature of a museum website. Moreover, the ease of access and the low cost of maintenance were seen as additional benefits of the museum blogs.<sup>68</sup> The first blogs emerged in 2002 and among them, the most vivid cases are "InfoTECMuseo", "Museum People", and "Modern Art Notes". Apart from the museum-user communication, the phenomenon of museum

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<sup>65</sup> C. Aced, *Web 2.0: the origin of the word that has changed the way we understand public relations*.

<sup>66</sup> R. Fernandez-Hernandez, T. Vacas-Guerrero, *Online reputation and user engagement as strategic resources of museums*.

<sup>67</sup> Y. Wang, N. Stash, *Cultivating Personalized Museum Tours Online and On-Site*, in "Interdisciplinary Science Reviews", 2009, 34, pp. 139-153.

<sup>68</sup> N. Simon, *Discourse in the Blogosphere: What Museums Can Learn from Web 2.0*.

blogging connected the professionals in the field and opened the online development of the informal museology community.<sup>69</sup>

Another early Web 2.0's tool that proved to be meaningful in the museum field is the news publication via Really Simple Syndication (RSS). RSS presented a content delivery instrument that collected the news and highlighted the updates so that the users could avoid visiting the website.<sup>70</sup>

The use of new media and technologies in museums is a contemporary trend and has countless applications. Other very significant trends are visitor-centered design and considering the exhibition as a complex medium that can offer an innovative experience of cultural heritage. For instance, online museum space can incorporate virtual tours that offer to visit 3D models of physical space. Apart from the museum's online communication focused on exhibitions, the heritage sector recently developed online tools for processing and user-adapting museum content. These instruments adopted a visitor-centered approach and illustrate the systematic complexity of Web 2.0.

Cultural Heritage Information Presentation (the CHIP) project creates means for the users to become their own independent curators. It allows accessing and investigating the online collections, designing a personalized museum programs, and receiving additional recommendations based on their preferences. It also connects to the museum physical space and helps users to navigate the museum with the help of the constantly updated and personalized map.<sup>71</sup>

INDIHU Exhibition is a Czech open-source software for museum professionals who are interested in creating multimedia virtual exhibitions. It maintains around 500 users and almost 200 virtual exhibitions that were created in 2020-2022. Its application showed that despite the wide creative opportunities offered by the tools of Web 2.0., museums are still in the process of adopting the technology. According to its data, users, the museum employees, use classical types of content – images, and texts and do not experiment with the offered exhibition schemes. It appears like they are transferring methods from standard exhibitions to online space.<sup>72</sup>

Overall, the emergence of the Internet and the development of Web 2.0 had a major impact on the field of communication. The key feature of Web 2.0 is that it made the dialogue and social

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<sup>69</sup> A. Levati, *#contemporaryart Social Media Communication of Contemporary Art Galleries and Museums in Milan*.<sup>70</sup> A. Levati, *#contemporaryart Social Media Communication of Contemporary Art Galleries and Museums in Milan*.<sup>71</sup> Y. Wang, N. Stash, *Cultivating Personalized Museum Tours Online and On-Site*.

<sup>72</sup> N. Wancova, J. Nedavaska, *Analyze vytvorených vystav v českém open source nastroji INDIA Exhibition*, in "Informace", 2021, 1, pp. 1-20.

interaction an inextricable part of the online space. For museum communication, Web 2.0 poses the challenge of online user engagement and community-building. Museum online strategies now construct the online communication within Web 2.0 and with regard to the expectation of user engagement and visitor experience-focused approach. These innovations changed the public understanding of museums from sources of conservation and presentation to places of production and diffusion.

### **Social media for museums**

Social media are the most Web 2.0-characterized phenomenon. The definitions of social media stress its interoperability and participatory character. For instance, Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein referred to social media as to “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content”.<sup>73</sup>

The development of Web 2.0 marked the democratization of the digital space manifested with the expansion of social networks. The nature of the social media places user in the center of communicative actions: its open and participatory features ensure the fast exchange of information, discussion and spread of the content. User-generated material dominates in the social networks. Social media is able to create networks and build communities based on shared interests.

The structure of the most spread social networks is similar and intuitive, sharing the universally understandable elements. The three foundational ones are:

- The profile, the personalized page where the user publishes their information, and which serves as a virtual self-representation addressed to the community;
- The network, which is the system of virtual relationships between different users;
- The content, which is the dynamic and constantly modifying part of social media (e.g., posts, comments, chats and groups).<sup>74</sup>

The additional important elements of social media include messages that ensure social connectedness or streams that enable social comparison. The reaction tools (“like” or “dislike” buttons, emojis, shares, comments) are the elements that hold a special meaning for the evaluation of the online communication strategy and quick simple engagement with the content. It functions in a two-fold process. First, users employ the reactions to express their opinion about the content.

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<sup>73</sup> A.M. Kaplan, M. Haenlein, *Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of social media*, in “Bus Horiz”, 2010, 53, pp. 59–68.

<sup>74</sup> A. Levati, *#contemporaryart Social Media Communication of Contemporary Art Galleries and Museums in Milan*.

In some cases, a reaction, e.g., a comment, may open a discussion. Second, an organization can measure the user feedback and navigate the audience preferences and expectations by the data on the reactions, both numerical (number of reactions) and thematic (positive or negative comments, comments about a particular topic).<sup>75</sup>

The phenomenon of the reaction on the web content in social media influence the reputation of an institution having the impact on decision-making and brand recognition that can bring secondary economic consequences. Social media enhances the word-of-mouth and also allows to rate the experience and leave feedback or reviews. This process concern museum social media presence. The simple presence of museum on platforms with user-generated content does not result in reputation increase and user trust. However, the online engagement with users can improve the museum online reputation and strengthen value creation. Online review and rankings left in museum social media proved to catalyze growth in museum visits and create realistic expectations of the museum, preparing a user for the visit.<sup>76</sup>

The statistics processed by Similarweb analytic platform shows the up-to-date data about the global spread of social networks. At the moment, the most popular ones are Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.<sup>77</sup> Facebook and Instagram accounts are frequently used for the museum online communication because their format is suitable for highly visual content and textual data.

Overall, the Web 2.0 changed the patterns of managing and consuming information. It started the age of engagement that correlated to the participative turn in heritage approaches. This process currently shapes the museum public communication, both on-site and in media. The museum communication now is expected to offer experience, interact with the audience and align with the visitor-centered or user-centered tendencies. The online communication in the present time is a must for a museum. The omnipresence of the online media ensures the reach for the target audience of museums. The online media speed of diffusion of information and the social media museum interaction with users allows attracting visitors, performing the educational mission and maintaining the community of loyal customers. The user engagement became a key issue in the museum online communication, transforming it from the unilateral act to the dialogue and creating the two-way process of public online interaction.

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<sup>75</sup> A. Padilla-Melendez, A.R. Del Aguila-Obra, *Web and Social Media Usage by Museums: Online Value Creation*.<sup>76</sup>  
<sup>76</sup> A. Padilla-Melendez, A.R. Del Aguila-Obra, *Web and Social Media Usage by Museums: Online Value Creation*.<sup>77</sup>  
<sup>77</sup> Similarweb Website <https://www.similarweb.com> [Accessed 04.06.2022]

## **The problematic issues in the museum online communication: accessibility, authority, and valorization**

The expansion of museum media communication to various online channels, the shift of the online space to many-to-many communication and led to the development of the challenging phenomena in the museum media interaction. In this section I regard the troublesome influences of the museum online communication: democratization, authority and valorization.

Digital and online interaction have created innovative instruments to approach, manage and communicate heritage. Museums as heritage institutions are involved into process of digitization and digitalization of heritage. The scholarly reflection on the digital rise in heritage industry made the process of heritage interpretation more democratized and polyvocal. The democratization of heritage is seen as a phenomenon creating public access to heritage construction, management and reflection with the decrease on dependence on expertise and institutions.<sup>78</sup> The heritage institutions themselves document the democratic aspirations for the digital approaches to heritage: "...digitization of cultural heritage [considered] a key challenge in order to make cultural heritage accessible for all".<sup>79</sup>

However, the democratization of heritage though digital access has some arguable sides. At the level of heritage construction, the implementation of digitization and digital interaction requires specific digital skills for professionals and the development of digital heritage products have high cost, not being available for the majority of heritage institutions, especially museums dependent on state funding.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, the decisions on what is 'heritage' and what parts of it can be digitized or digitalized remains at the authority of heritage institutions. This way the heritage that can be accessed digitally stays within the framework of hegemonic narrative.<sup>81</sup>

The expansion of museum online communication which represents heritage created space for more voices to be heard and participate in discussion.<sup>82</sup> It provides the space to express opinions more freely and give direct feedback. Potentially, the practice of placing the debate around heritage online could result in the democratization. However, the problematic part is that

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<sup>78</sup> J. Taylor, L.K. Gibson, *Digitisation, digital interaction and social media: embedded barriers to democratic heritage*, in "International Journal of Heritage Studies", 2017. 23, pp. 408-420.

<sup>79</sup> The Joint Programming Initiative on Cultural Heritage and Global Change, *Vision Document*, 2010, p. 6. [https://www.heritageresearch-hub.eu/app/uploads/JPI\\_only/Documents/Vision-Documents/Vision-Documents\\_25.5.2010.pdf](https://www.heritageresearch-hub.eu/app/uploads/JPI_only/Documents/Vision-Documents/Vision-Documents_25.5.2010.pdf), [Accessed 05.06.2022].

<sup>80</sup> J. Taylor, L.K. Gibson, *Digitisation, digital interaction and social media: embedded barriers to democratic heritage*.

<sup>81</sup> J. Taylor, L.K. Gibson, *Digitisation, digital interaction and social media: embedded barriers to democratic heritage*.

<sup>82</sup> M. Economou, *Heritage in the Digital Age*, in W. Logan, M.N. Craith, U. Kockel (eds.), *A Companion to Heritage Studies*, New Jersey 2016, pp. 216-229.

the interaction is mostly responsive as the issues of what to be communicated and in which way has already been made by an institution. Moreover, the online communication includes the marketing aspirations and distribution-driven expectations that also lead to the manipulative kind of construction of dialogue and the discourse that would direct the participants.<sup>83</sup>

The argument that the global character of the Web 2.0. results in increase of access to the digitized heritage is also objectionable. The shift from physicality to virtuality appears to be enhancing democratization by easier spread and consumption of museum content, e.g., in museum website digital archives or through online exhibitions, when staying remote. Nevertheless, the web analytics of museum websites shows that most of the audience have tertiary degree and come from the Western part of the world. The rise of democratic access to heritage is thus correlated to the more technologically equipped societies and to an educated social stratum, leaving big part of the world and society behind by the secondary factors influencing the consumption of museum content.<sup>84</sup>

The omnipresent and polyvocal character of online media influence the issue of authority and expertise in heritage. Firstly, the narrator in the communicative act when it transmits to an online source is less seen. For example, a museum website despite being usually approached as a trustworthy source by the users, it might take away the direct connection to an institution and contribute to the loss of authority but the obsolesce. Moreover, the heterogeneous scene of online space filled with the user-generated material allows visitors to create their own representations of a museum. This content is beyond the museum's control. The problem lies in the dissemination of interpretations that can spread false or biased information.<sup>85</sup>

The online museum communication impacts its institutional performance: the online museum presentation, reputation and engagement contribute to museum economic and social capitals. Museums perform online value creation in the communication channels (e.g., website, social media) and the value can be complemented by the 3<sup>rd</sup> party online-sources. Thus, the online value of museums impacts the reputation and the promotional effectiveness. The absence of online strategy can lead to negative results in number of museum visit. The necessity to be online and interact with the users requires the museums to develop an elaborate online strategy.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> J. Taylor, L.K. Gibson, *Digitisation, digital interaction and social media: embedded barriers to democratic heritage*.

<sup>84</sup> M. Enhuber, *Art, space and technology: how the digitisation and digitalisation of art space affect the consumption of art - a critical approach*, in "Digital Creativity", 2015, in "Digital Creativity", 2015, 26, pp. 121-137.

<sup>85</sup> G.N. Swinney, *Projecting the Museum: Moving images in, and of, Scotland's national museum*, in "Museum History Journal", 2019, 12, pp. 129-152.

<sup>86</sup> A. Padilla-Melendez, A.R. Del Aguila-Obra, *Web and Social Media Usage by Museums: Online Value Creation*.

The development of the phenomenon of museum media communication has been going since the 19<sup>th</sup>-century France 'printed museum' to the present time of Web 2.0. It shifted from the unilateral communication to the current participative pattern. Now museums face the challenge of online engagement with the audience that influences the performance of museum, the appreciation of its social role and the theme that museum represents. In the Web 2.0 users are seen as a fundamental parameter to which the communication strategies of cultural institutions shall adapt.

## **The three-level analysis of a national gallery online communication**

### **Research question**

This thesis interrogates the intertwined relationship in the museum's online communication with the central research question: What is the role and the effects of online communication in the National Gallery Prague and the Hungarian National Gallery? The research builds on the three dimensions: online communication design, consumption and engagement. These points allow me to reveal the relations between online strategy construction, its manifestation through online communication, and the place of audience-museum interaction in it.

The thesis will concern the designer perspective and user perspective on the online exhibition communication. It will engage with the three levels of analysis: design, consumption, and user engagement. The data source set of the thesis is website content developed by the National Gallery Prague and the Hungarian National Gallery.

The additional research questions deepen the research scope and highlight the details I aspire to investigate:

1. What is the goal of a gallery's online communication?
2. What is a gallery's online strategy: how does it work with media? What kind of media does it include and what information do they share?
3. What are online engagement strategies applied in a gallery? What are their goals? What kind of community do they build?
4. What are the issues that museum staff encounter when developing online communication?
5. How does a gallery position the online communication for the international audience? How does it interact with them?

The research questions are driven towards the process of museum online communication and user engagement. They are aimed to navigate the research to the understanding of online communication design and the factors that influence it. It allows studying designer and user perspectives to reveal the effectiveness of the gallery's online strategy and the results of the engagement approaches taken by it. The questions regard the phenomenon of construction of communication at the three stages: design, consumption, and engagement. They are intended to embrace its multidimensional character and to understand it as a whole.

The emphasis of the thesis will be on the hypothesis that the focus of a national gallery's online strategy is aimed to present the exhibition content, attract the visitors, build the online



community and expand beyond the community of gallery-goers. To reach these goals the gallery implements the online engagement practices. The strategy is connected to the missions of the gallery:

1. Education and art promotion for the local community;
2. Presentation of the national art for the international audience.

The previous studies conducted in the field of museum online communication allow me to suppose that the effectiveness of online engagement strategies remains low.<sup>87</sup> This thesis attempts to understand the gap between the expectations and intentions of a national gallery online strategy and the results of online communication connected to the website content.

I plan to investigate the museum's online communication within research focused on the case studies of the National Gallery Prague and the Hungarian National Gallery. The Central European geographical scope of the research allows concentrating on the practices of a museum online strategy in a national state institution located in a capital city. The national galleries are the central institutions of a country focusing on national fine art. As a state-affiliated heritage institutions they often create a connection to the present-day agenda of the region and tie the research to issues of identity-building and its manifestation of national art through the online space. This aspect can hold a significant part in the process of strategy development and the power relations behind it. The engagement with an international English-speaking audience drives the perspective on the presentation of a national gallery and national art beyond the local community.

### **Methodology overview**

The research concerns the whole production cycle of a national gallery online communication with a focus on the online content developed by a gallery. The online strategy landscape is constructed by the gallery and co-constructed by the users, and the audience. I address the three levels of the communication construction and, consequently, the three levels of the production cycle: design, consumption and user engagement. I apply mixed methods to achieve the complex understanding of the National Gallery Prague and the Hungarian National Gallery online communication development and results. In this section I describe the steps of the analysis.

The products of the first level of museum online communication construction, the design, are the gallery's website and official social media. The designer perspective is addressed through

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<sup>87</sup> A. Desvallées, *Key concepts of Museology*; S.T. Gronemann, *Mediated Co-construction of Museums and Audiences on Facebook*; R. Fernandez-Hernandez, T. Vacas-Guerrero, *Online reputation and user engagement as strategic resources of museums*, in "Museum Management and Curatorship", 2021, 36, pp. 553-568.

semi-structured interviews with public relations specialists of a gallery. I was able to reach out to the National Gallery Prague and the Hungarian National Gallery for the interviews. This step of analysis aims to comprehend the creation of online communication in a gallery and its online strategy. I pay the special attention to the gallery's engagement strategies as the users are the key element of the online communication and museum focus. The goal setting and communication construction are important to understand in order to shed light on the gallery's motivations behind the online presence. The goal of an interview is to understand the online strategy of a national gallery. The questions are divided into two parts. The first one is about the general online strategy of the Gallery and the second is dedicated to the details of website and social media management. All the information is used anonymously in the research. The questions are indicated in Appendix 1.

The second step of the communication process, the consumption, is represented by an analysis of online sources of the galleries: websites and social media. In this stage of the study, I access the websites of the National Gallery Prague and the Hungarian National Gallery to outline the state of the art of national state museums online communication in the Central European region. The in-depth investigation of the websites content and messages sheds the light on the meaningful themes that the galleries touch upon in their online communication and allows to see what kind of narratives they develop and share. The textual data of the interviews, the website and the social media are assessed with the textual analysis and the thematic content analysis through coding to taxonomize texts and analytic categories to generalize them into more abstract notions about the recurring themes. This analysis draws the understanding of a gallery's key concepts about the online communication construction. The analysis of the website and social media can highlight the themes used in the online communication.

The user's responses on a gallery's media constitute the third level of analysis. To test the findings from the analysis of the online content I conducted semi-structured interviews with international students of the Faculty of Humanities of Eötvös Loránd University. In this part of the data, I focused on the Budapest-based international students and the Hungarian National Gallery. Interviews are focused on a gallery's website as a platform for discussion and museum-user interaction. The interview with the English-speaking international students brings the direct opinion on the website and engagement practices within it. The method is the same as in the first analytical stage: qualitative interviews with the following thematic decoding. I compare the results of the decoding with the conclusions from the designer level and examine the correlation of the one to the other. This will create the straight connection between the designer intentions and the user's reception.

The investigation of the engagement with a young international audience offers an insight into the influence of online communication on the image of a national gallery and the acquisition of national art. The objective of international study programmes is to reinforce the cultural exchange and create a multicultural environment. For instance, the Erasmus Student Mobility Programs describe its goals as the promotion of the European shared cultural scale for university students, the exchange of cultural backgrounds, and strengthening of the European identity.<sup>88</sup> The communication around a national gallery contributes to the construction of the national brand and the research aims to address how it can be perceived by international students coming from various cultural backgrounds and living as expats.

The purposed investigation of the English-speaking international audience creates a case of analysis of the gallery's online strategies concerning international visibility of the Gallery and Hungarian art. Online communication and engagement aimed beyond the local community are one of the ways to perform the mission of the National Gallery to present Hungarian art on a wider scale. For instance, the website of the gallery invites users to join the Friends of the Museum community and donate to input into the development of the international branding: "The generosity and commitment of our Friends contribute to the recognition of one of the most important cultural brands in Hungary".<sup>89</sup> The matter of orientation on the national brand development thus appears to be one of the goals of the gallery.

Overall, the analysis focusing on three operational levels (design, consumption, and engagement) create a unified understanding of the gallery's online strategy. Accessing the sources allows the comprehensive analysis of the gallery's online communication design, online engagement practices and its results. Moreover, it provides a possibility to connect exhibitions' online communication to the context of international online presentations of the gallery and the national art.

In this part of the thesis, I attempted to present the framework for the empirical stage of the study. In the Introduction, I described and problematized the phenomenon of museum online communication. In the literature review, I addressed the recent studies driving attention to the importance of museum online communication in the present time. The current scholarly debate considers user engagement as a key element of the museum online strategy. User-institution interaction impacts the museum performance and appears to be the indispensable way for a museum to remain valid and relevant in the changing society. The state-of-art of the field proves

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<sup>88</sup>*European Commission Website* <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a/priorities-of-the-erasmus-programme/objectives-features> [Accessed 28 May 2022].

<sup>89</sup>*Hungarian national gallery's Website* [Accessed 2 June 2022].

the relevance of this research project for the scope of the Central European region. The theoretical concepts of the research highlight its key elements: gallery, online space, online communication strategy, museum audience, online participation and engagement. The section on the history of media usage for museums addresses the long time of the museum presence in media. It shows the growing complexity of the museum media communication from the printed museum catalogues to the museums facing the challenge of Web 2.0. The significant rise of the role of the users for the museum communication is pointed out in this part. Moreover, the part holds a focus on the multiplication and increasing heterogeneity of the media and online space, another appeal for the museum online communication.

The sections on the three-level analysis explains the analytical frame for the research. The main research question is: What is the role and the effects of online communication in the National Gallery Prague and the Hungarian National Gallery? The three levels of analysis bring the comprehension of the whole production cycle of the online communication: design, consumption, and engagement. The data set emerging from these levels offers an insight into all the stages. The main methods, the content analysis of the online content allow to classify the approaches and themes revolving in the communication. The qualitative interviews with designers and consumers connect both perspectives and investigate the expectations and the effects of online strategies.

Overall, this part of the thesis endeavored to place the phenomenon of a national gallery's online strategy into the academic, historical, and analytical context. The nature of the present time with the digital development and the omnipresent participation tendencies are especially appealing in the issue of the gallery's online communication for its social role, institutional mission, and organizational performance. In the empirical chapters I describe the methodology in greater detail, present the data and the findings, and connect the result of the three stages of analysis to the present-day environment of the Visegrad countries.

### **The Visegrad Four framework: embodying national narratives**

The Visegrad Four includes the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, four Central European countries that share geographical proximity and a similar historical background from the Middle Ages until the post-soviet regime change and the present time. The Visegrad alliance's goal is to cooperate in political, economic, and cultural affairs.<sup>90</sup> In this part of the study, I address the narratives in the websites of the National Gallery Prague and the Hungarian National Gallery with the aspiration to understand what messages and themes these institutions present to the English-speaking audience that visits the galleries, including both tourists and expats. The national galleries are the central heritage institutions that engage in a discussion about the national art of the Visegrad Four countries. Considering the historical features in the political environment that influenced the development of national art collections, the textual analysis of the present day national galleries websites can highlight the main topics and spheres of outreach of the galleries. In this chapter, I first explain the method of website analysis, proceeding to the description and analysis of the data for each national gallery. In the final part of the chapter, I compare the results between the National Gallery Prague and the Hungarian National Gallery galleries and connect them to the differences in the national narratives of the states.

Visegrad alliance emerged as a reaction to the post-socialist liberal changes and is prone to national conservatism and anti-liberal climate.<sup>91</sup> The rise of nationalism in Visegrad countries took to protect ethnic culture and develop a barrier between them and the liberal Western European countries and Central European counties. This process gained enthusiasm in the Visegrad countries: “the most energy has been spent at the memory and identity fronts”.<sup>92</sup> The conservative and nationalist narratives in the Visegrad countries became the consequence of the efforts.

The connection between the museums and the nation-building can be apparent when a museum belongs to a state and is addressed as a national institution: “The role played by museums (all over Europe) as part of the national construction process should not be ignored, especially since, even today a significant number of museums in Eastern Europe are still tributary to this vision – either by the content of their collections or by the general frame of interpretation still in use”.<sup>93</sup> These notions allow me to access the National Gallery Prague and the Hungarian National

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<sup>90</sup> The Visegrad Group Website <https://www.visegradgroup.eu> [Accessed 30 March 2023]

<sup>91</sup> P. Barša, Z. Hesová, *Central European culture wars: beyond post-communism and populism* Prague 2021.

<sup>92</sup> S. Riishøj, *Europeanization and Eurocepticism: Experiences from Poland and the Czech Republic*, in “Nationalities Papers”, 2007, 35, pp. 503-535.

<sup>93</sup> M. Bira, *Communicating Museums: A Textual Analysis of Content and Interaction Management* in “Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management and Innovation”, 2018, 4, pp. 63-80.

Gallery as a part of nation-construction process that has been under the influence of the Visegrad Four common discursive framework on conservatism and nationalism.

The analysis of the online communication sources of the National Gallery Prague and the Hungarian National Gallery websites and social media is the central source of data for this thesis. The interview with curators and the interview with the international students are the supplementary steps to test the conclusions based on the analysis of the websites. The study of the websites creates a comprehensive overview of the way the Galleries present themselves and the themes they consider meaningful to integrate into the self-interpretation.

## The textual analysis of a website content

Websites are the main online communication channel of the galleries through which they can not only inform and invite visitors but also manifest and reaffirm their mission and social role. The goal of this textual analysis is to assess both the form and the substance of a gallery's website as a self-representation tool with a focus on content management and interaction management. Monica Bîră, a Lecturer at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Romania, used the classification into content and interaction management as a model to investigate the websites of Museums of Toys, which enabled her to conduct a comprehensive study on the museums' presentation and engagement strategies. Content management in relation to the subject implies the way the website is organized, the design, the objects showcased there, the texts, and the language. Interaction management includes interaction opportunities on a website, interaction instruments, and social media.<sup>94</sup> The investigation of design and visual content allows me to highlight the forms of communication chosen by the galleries and the signs that galleries include in their primary online channel. The content analysis of textual content in the websites ensures a deeper understanding of the messages developed by the galleries. The attention to the interactive elements permits to interpret the audience engagement strategy of a gallery. Furthermore, the scholar connects the development of a discourse on a website about a historical museum building or a privileged location to the reinforcement of authority and reliability. Bira drives the analogy between the development of a narrative about space and the construction of a virtual space from the position of power by a museum.<sup>95</sup> I use this analysis model to identify the correlation between the status of a national gallery and the emphasis on the landmark space and location in a website to strengthen the public image. Constructing the discourse about the museum requires identification of a space of action that comes to be a space of social interaction between an institution and a visitor.

After analyzing the narratives about a gallery's space, I continue to the online space of a gallery, the website, where I study the elements of content and interaction management. I start the investigation for each website by describing the design and the website organization. I include the data from SimilarWeb, the web analytics software available publicly that measures such categories as the number of website visits, the geography of users, social media traffic, and search keywords that lead to a website. Secondly, I conduct word frequency analysis and textual analysis of the textual data from a whole website, including all the available pages. As a next step, I proceed with the word frequency analysis and textual analysis of the pages dedicated to temporary exhibitions

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<sup>94</sup> M. Bîră, *Communicating Museums: A Textual Analysis of Content and Interaction Management*, cit. p. 65.

<sup>95</sup> M. Bîră, *Communicating Museums: A Textual Analysis of Content and Interaction Management*, cit. p. 66.

in 2020-2023 to understand the differences in the presentation of limited-time exhibitions that took place in post-Covid time. This period is particular because, after the COVID pandemic, the galleries started to increase their online presence and produce more detailed web content.<sup>96</sup> Following, I highlight the interactive elements and give a brief overview of a gallery's social media. Despite the fact that I am not able to conduct a full-scale analysis of social media because of language limitations, as the galleries manage the social media only in their local languages, I consider it important to include this online channel in the analysis to delineate its functions. Additionally, I dedicate a separate section to the statements about the social role of a gallery, e.g., education activities, public events, and research work. The goal is to supplement the analysis of online interactive instruments with an outline of the audience engagement initiatives introduced as a part of a gallery's public image. After examining the case of each gallery individually, I compare the results from four galleries to comment on differences and similarities and the connection to the national narratives.

The analysis of textual data develops through two steps: word frequency counting and interaction and content management analysis. While conducting the examination of a website's textual sources, I first focused on the frequency of the words used in the texts. Mining the frequently occurring words outlined the concepts that are the most significant for a gallery to include in the online presentation. The study by Derek H. Alderman and E. Arnold Modlin Jr. applied the same method to retrieve the most frequent words from historic plantation websites in North Carolina. The purpose of the investigation was to assess the level of representation of the slavery theme in online promotional texts as well as the specificities of narratives about slavery.<sup>97</sup> After data cleaning, the corpus of texts in their research included 216000 words from 20 websites dedicated to plantation tourism. With the help of word frequency counting software, the authors identified the number of words related to slavery and counted the relation per cent to the total amount of words on a website. Despite the focus of their study on the search for the specific keyword "slavery", the method of word frequency counting as a tool to retrieve central concepts from corpora is applicable to a textual analysis that I conduct in this thesis. Unlike Alderman and Modlin Jr., after collecting and cleaning textual data, I concentrated on descending order of the most used words on each gallery's website. The value of the top frequent words is that by quantity, they allocate the recurrent themes in a text that shape the self-created image of a gallery online.

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<sup>96</sup> B. Choi, J. Kim, *Changes and Challenges in Museum Management after the COVID-19 Pandemic* in "Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity", 2021, 7.

<sup>97</sup> D.H. Alderman, E. A. Modlin Jr, *(In)Visibility of the Enslaved Within Online Plantation Tourism Marketing: A Textual Analysis of North Carolina Websites* in "Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing", 2008, 25, pp. 265-281.



First, I counted the total amount of words on each website, excluding function words, navigation links, and non-essential texts such as admission hours, copyright information or social media links. The exclusion of service or function texts creates more clear data with a focus on the message. Additionally, I excluded the titles of the pages and the name of an institution (e.g., the unit “National Gallery Prague”) because these words undermine the meaning of the frequency of such units as ‘national’ or a name of the country mentioned without the connection to the title of a gallery. This started as a time-consuming task because I needed to scrape texts from the HTML format of a website, convert them into textual format (.txt or .docx), clean them from stop words and unsubstantial parts, paste them into online word counting software (e.g., Smart Word Counter) and divide texts into the sections of 20000 charts to comply with the maximum amount of data available for one-time word counting in the program. With the amount of data from four galleries’ websites that constituted 170100 words the process could take a long time, approximately two weeks to collect and cleanse the data before I could analyse it. To shorten the time and automatize the word counting analysis, I used a script in Python version 3.11, a computer programming language. The code follows multiple steps to perform word frequency analysis. It starts the live website data processing by defining the base URL web address. It proceeds with extracting the text from a website using the Requests library to fetch the HTML content of the base URL and the BeautifulSoup package to parse the HTML data and identify links to other website pages. Then it iterates over each link and repeats the process of retrieving the main body of text on a webpage, parsing, and excluding non-essential text (e.g., navigation links, sidebar content, footer texts) and webpage titles. Additionally, with the instrument Natural Language Toolkit library, the code specifies a list of stop words that are excluded from a text, such as function vocabulary, e.g., determiners, pronouns, and conjunctions. The script processes the ready text to remove non-alphabetic characters and lowercase the text to avoid double counting in case of capital letters. Then the script counts the total amount of words on a website. Finally, the script calculates the frequency of each word in the text using Python's built-in Counter object, stores the results in a dictionary file, and sorts them by frequency in descending order. Beyond that, the script saves the whole corpus of text into a separate file making it available for further analysis. Overall, this script offers an automated method for extracting and counting textual data from any website. After processing the National Galleries’ websites through the script and receiving a list of keywords, I was able to use the top five most frequent units as codes for the next step, the analysis of the textual content on a website. To address the textual data dedicated to the temporary exhibitions, I manually collected the texts related to the temporary exhibitions in 2020-2023 in the four galleries. This included copying and pasting the text into textual document and then processing it through the

Python script as a word collection. The script completed the same operations of cleaning the data and retrieving the frequently used words.

The process in a script that I described is called web scraping. There are certain concerns about the ethical and legal side of web scraping. The automatic procedure of extracting online data may be considered a legal violation if not complying with the requirements of copyright law defending intellectual property and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).<sup>98</sup> The websites that I access for web scraping are under the GDPR, the regulation that governs personal data processing in the territory of the European Union. To avoid legal conflict, I disclaim that I access textual data on the websites of the National Gallery Prague and Hungarian National Gallery, solely for research purposes, which is a fair data processing activity in accordance with the GDPR.<sup>99</sup> I do not collect any personal data of any individual. Additionally, the websites of the National Gallery Prague and Hungarian National Gallery have not published any material prohibiting the usage of publicly available textual information (e.g., Terms and Conditions), except for short statements that each website is under the protection of copyright. To respect copyright law, I indicate sources of textual data in footnotes and citations together with the date of access to the source. I do not reproduce the obtained data without reference to an initial source and do not collect any visual content (e.g., images or video sources).

Having conducted word frequency analysis, I proceed to the content analysis of a website based on the top five keywords retrieved from the texts. The content analysis that I conduct in this thesis is both a qualitative and quantitative research method. The word frequency analysis assigns the keywords with numerical values and corresponds to the main themes in online communication. In this step of the study, I transcend to the qualitative side of content analysis, concentrating on understanding and interpreting the most frequent words in the context of the processed text and the original webpage. Following the keyword with the Microsoft Word in-text search and the search bar on a website, I identify and contextualize themes that the code is included in. For instance, I was able to see that the code “art” in the National Gallery Prague website appeared in relation to themes about education, description of exhibitions, and collections. This allows me to outline the network of themes within a website and discover the most extensive categories in a gallery’s online communication. After assessing the websites of the Visegrad Four countries’ national galleries I compare the most frequent words and the patterns of themes within websites

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<sup>98</sup> A. Luscombe, K. Dick et al., *Algorithmic thinking in the public interest: navigating technical, legal, and ethical hurdles to web scraping in the social sciences* in “Qual Quant”, 2022, 56, pp. 1023-1044.

<sup>99</sup> The General Data Protection Regulation Website <https://gdpr-info.eu> [Accessed 1 April 2023]

to comprehend the peculiarities of online communication in the national galleries and the features of online image-formation of the state institutions responsible for national art.

In these sections, I outlined the content analysis methods that I apply for the online source of the galleries. The ascending analysis from the level of language units to the level of patterns within online texts enables me to address the websites of the national galleries as a self-representation online channel and to deconstruct the main themes of a gallery's public communication. Along with the analysis of categories of web content management and interaction management, the website investigation brings a comprehensive picture of the main online channels of a gallery. Web content management category and interaction management category include the narratives about space and location as a landmark construction instrument, the description of a website organization and design, the incorporation of web metrics data in the analysis, the regard to the interaction opportunities and social media, and the attention to the statements about a social role or mission of a gallery. When brought together, these elements of analysis constitute an overview of a gallery's online communication and online public image. In the next sections, I conduct the analysis, describe the data, share the results, and draw together all the parts of the investigation for each gallery.

## **The National Gallery Prague online communication**

The National Gallery Prague's online communication includes several channels: the website [www.ngprague.cz](http://www.ngprague.cz) and social network accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. In the next chapter, I develop a detailed study of the website [www.ngprague.cz](http://www.ngprague.cz) as a central communication source of the National Gallery Prague, with most of the information available in the English language, in contrast to its social media profiles.

### **The National Gallery Prague as a landmark**

Monica Bîră's concept of connecting the location of a museum with a manifestation of power finds support in Gregory J. Ashworth's concept of a landmark, that I explain before I start the investigation. Gregory J. Ashworth argues that heritage is widely used for the branding of places and uses the metaphor of the past in the present and for the future. The goal of this process is to use the past elements for the present benefits, either social, economic, or cultural: e.g., the attraction of tourists, enhancement of local identity, and strengthening of the community. Thus, place branding is an instrument to communicate the past as heritage. G.J. Ashworth defined place branding as an "idea of discovering or creating some uniqueness, which differentiates one place from others in order to gain a competitive brand value".<sup>100</sup> The notion of branding is central to the place branding concept. Branding is the instrument that creates symbolic associations with a product and contributes to the valorization of a product by indicating its distinctive qualities. In this regard, national galleries present an example where space comes together with historical, cultural, and heritage values. The four Central European national galleries stay in buildings of historical importance and engage with the national Fine art. In a way, the location of galleries becomes a capital city landmark, where the meanings of national pride are reinforced by the connection to the tangible heritage, art, and the discussion of the national past. In this section of the analysis, I investigate how each national gallery constructs a discourse about its past and location and presents them online, intertwining the physical world and the virtual space construction. I start with a short overview of the NGP history that I write in accordance with the information from the website [www.ngprague.cz](http://www.ngprague.cz).

The history of the NGP collection started in the early 17th century when Rudolph II art's collection received Albrecht Durer's Feast of the Rosary, the painting that has belonged to the NGP funds up to the present day. Since the 17th century, the private collections of Czech nobles started to evolve, laying the grounds for the national collection of Fine Arts. The National Gallery Prague as an institution started its development with The Society of Patriotic Friends of the Arts,

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<sup>100</sup> G.J. Ashworth, *The Instruments of Place Branding: How is it Done?*, in "European Spatial Research and Policy", 2009, 16, pp. 9-22.

the social group of Czech nobles and intellectuals who decided to establish the Academy of Fine Arts and the public Picture Gallery in 1796. The Modern Gallery of the Kingdom of Bohemia which existed in 1902-1942 continued the development of the collection with the contemporary art of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Picture Gallery developed into the central art collection of the Czechoslovak state in 1918 and underwent significant growth under Vincenc Kramář in the following years with the establishment of the French Collection. The Picture Gallery was nationalized in 1936. During World War II, the Modern Gallery's funds were merged with the Picture Gallery, and it was known as the Czech-Moravian Land Gallery under the Protectorate. In 1949, the state finalized the postwar institutional reorganization and the Gallery obtained its present form and the title of the National Gallery Prague (Národní galerie Praha). The Gallery's collections encompass various periods and styles, including the Collection of Old Masters, Collection of Nineteenth Century Art and Classical Modernism, Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art, Collection of Prints and Drawings, and Collection of Asian Art. The NGP collections have been housed in various locations in Prague, including the Sternberg Palace, Rudolfinum, and Municipal Library. Today, the National Gallery administers eight buildings in Prague and holds short-term exhibitions in the Waldstein Riding School.<sup>101</sup>

In the website, the National Gallery Prague (NGP) puts a great emphasis on its locations, highlighting the historical and architectural value of the buildings. The indication of an event location appears to be of key importance for the gallery, as the name of a venue is placed under the title of an announcement together with the date starting from the homepage of a website. The title body of every announcement consists of three parts in total: a name, a date, and a location. Moreover, the page dedicated to the NGP buildings is the first in the bar menu under the title “About Us” on the website. In all the pages with an exhibition or event description, there is a short section with reference to a venue including a hyperlink that leads to a page dedicated to the building, where one can find information on the opening hours, geographical location, public transport connections, accessibility, and history. The NGP takes great care through the website to navigate a visitor and highlights the information about the location in every announcement of an event, helping people find the way to the Gallery.

Unlike the Hungarian National Gallery, the National Gallery Prague has eight buildings spread around the historical core of the city and hosting different collections, exhibitions, and branches of management. For a non-informed user, this setup can be confusing and requires minor research to identify locations when planning a visit. The gallery indicates the opening hours of each building, gives information on the public transport reaching it, and enlists the exhibitions

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<sup>101</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/about/page/history> [Accessed 16 May 2023] 52

available there or the other uses of a building. In the analysis I follow the order of importance of each building for the Gallery and adhere by the order it was presented on the website. For instance, the hub of the NGP, the Trade Fair Palace welcomes three permanent and three temporary exhibitions in May 2023. In contrast, the Waldstein Riding School building has no permanent exhibition and hosts only short-term projects. At the moment, it has one upcoming exhibition planned for March-July 2023. In this case, the Gallery offers a link to a list of past exhibitions that happened at a location. Curiously, the NGP adds another building to the list of locations. The latter is in Venice and hosts the Czech and Slovak Pavilion for the Venice Biennale. Despite the Pavilion being under reconstruction and is outside of Prague, the NGP lists it from the position of an institution responsible for national art. The mention of the Pavilion also adds up to the theme of the history of the international presentation of Czech art from the 15th Venice Biennale in 1926 up to the present time.

The NGP presents its buildings with a description of their history and the addition of images. The length and the contents of the description vary depending on the historical value of a building. The four iconic buildings of the NGP are presented extensively, with a detailed narration of their past and texts that highlight their architectural or historical importance. Trade Fair Palace is referred to as a “gem of Czech Functionalist architecture”.<sup>102</sup> In similar wording, the website presents the Sternberg Palace: “a first-rate jewel of High Baroque architecture in Prague”.<sup>103</sup> The size of a textual description changes from around 250 signs with spaces for Salm Palace to 3550 signs with spaces for the Convent of St. Agnes of Bohemia, the lengthiest text dedicated to a building on the website. After telling the story of the past of the Convent, the NGP states that “because of its importance, it was declared a national cultural monument in 1970”.<sup>104</sup> These three buildings gain an image of a landmark in the NGP website presentations which put emphasis on the rich past, historical importance, and the unique architectural features of the buildings. The Kinsky Palace description does not follow this strategy despite the clear landmark location of the building in Old Town Square, one of the hottest tourist spots in Prague. However, the NGP website limits the text to a short history of its construction and modifications, briefly mentioning the Medieval parts and not accentuating it with praising words. At the moment, there is no functioning exhibition in Kinsky Palace, and it hosts the National Gallery Prague bookshop.<sup>105</sup> Another

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<sup>102</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/about/buildings/trade-fair-palace> [Accessed 16 May 2023].

<sup>103</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/about/buildings/sternberg-palace> [Accessed 16 May 2023].

<sup>104</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/about/buildings/convent-of-st-agnes-of-bohemia> [Accessed 16 May 2023].

<sup>105</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/about/buildings/kinsky-palace> [Accessed 16 May 2023].

technique to highlight the significance of a building is an appeal to special architectural features or visual peculiarities, as in the description of Schwarzenberg Palace: “In the years 1870–1874, it received its iconic sgraffito decoration based on the design of Josef Schulz”.<sup>106</sup> A peculiar example of the combination of a building description and its function is found in a text on Sternberg Palace: “Both the building and its furnishings combine diverse art forms, creating the perfect space for artworks of miscellaneous styles and times”.<sup>107</sup> This is the only case when the NGP refers to the space of a building used to store and exhibit art rather than telling the history and describing the architectural elements of a building. Additionally, the website indicates the gardens at the Convent of St. Agnes of Bohemia and Sternberg Palace, thus taking the Gallery’s space outside of buildings and connecting it to nature. Both gardens are open to the public and have collections of modern Czech sculptures in Sternberg Palace Garden and contemporary Czech sculptures in the Convent Garden.<sup>108</sup> Other public facilities of the National Gallery Prague hosted in its buildings include bookstores and gastronomy places such as cafes or restaurants. This outlines how the Gallery not only presents art but engages in entertainment and commercial activity. Building accessibility is a separate topic for the NGP as it dedicates a specific webpage for it, enlisting the buildings and indicating the access features: elevators, staircases, step-free entrances, and wheelchair accessibility. On the page, the Gallery also offers the possibility to organize a tour or a workshop based on specific needs upon request.<sup>109</sup>

The NGP takes great care in presenting and explaining its different locations, which give a hint on the significant volume of the collection and the available venues for exhibiting or setting public events. In connection with the location, the NGP offers venues for hire for private events, e.g., concerts, conferences, or weddings. But the website takes into account not only the buildings but also what happens inside of its walls. The references to the space of the NGP are recurrent throughout the website. For instance, the NGP uses the statement “Space for Education, Discussion, and Experiences” which drives the connection from the historical importance of its setup and the mission of presenting the national art to the social role of the Gallery as to educate and start a discussion.<sup>110</sup> Overall, the National Gallery Prague puts an emphasis on the historical importance of its locations, inscribing them into the history of the state and the city. Every building description includes at least a short statement about its history and the connection to a specific

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<sup>106</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/about/buildings/schwarzenberg-palace> [Accessed 16 May 2023].

<sup>107</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/about/buildings/sternberg-palace> [Accessed 16 May 2023].

<sup>108</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/about/buildings/sternberg-palace> [Accessed 16 May 2023].

<sup>109</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/about/accessibility> [Accessed 16 May 2023].

<sup>110</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/about/buildings> [Accessed 10 May 2023].

time period Middle Ages, Renaissance, Baroque Era, Modern Times, or the present day. Remarkably, the buildings present the major historical periods and architectural styles. Sometimes, the art located in the buildings correlate to the period too, e.g., the Convent of St. Agnes of Bohemia display Medieval and Gothic art. But the Gallery does not limit the narration by the periods and dates and appeals to significant personalities: the noble people, the rulers, and the presidents are included in the texts dedicated to the venues. The second way to highlight the relevance of a building is a reference to its architectural value. The National Gallery Prague constructs the discourse about its locations by using references to Czech history and underlining the linkage between the past, the previous functions of the buildings, and the present-day belonging to the National Gallery, the institution engaging with the interpretation of national history through art. The NGP appears to present itself as a descendant of the Czech past appointed to stay in iconic buildings of the capital of the Czech Republic. However, the Gallery does not detach itself from the needs of present-day customers, not only including bookstores and restaurants but offering venues for private events and developing an accessible space.

### **The National Gallery Prague content management analysis**

The website content management analysis addresses the formal qualities of a web source, such as design and structure, as well as the materials available there, e.g., texts or images. It is a way to understand how the Gallery manages its online content. Web analytics, as a part of this analysis, is an illustrative instrument to gain insight into a website's performance, audience engagement, and user behavior.<sup>111</sup> The application of web metrics into research methodology has been accepted in studies on a web platform evaluation in many research fields. The recent research in museology included web analytics services analogous to SimilarWeb in the studies about the museum's online performance. For instance, Padilla-Melendez and Aguila-Obra derived data from Alexa web rankings to understand the effectiveness of a museum online strategy in relation to the number of website visits and the website popularity estimates.<sup>112</sup> In this study, I use the data from SimilarWeb, a service offering web analytical information on a given website and able to conduct a web analysis on request when providing a URL of a website. The methodology of the SimilarWeb consists of the usage of multiple user, site, and network-centric data collections to corroborate the findings. The instruments and the reliability of the SimilarWeb analytics are proven by Bernard J. Jansen et al. in a study comparing SimilarWeb and Google Analytics that

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<sup>111</sup> The SimilarWeb website <https://www.similarweb.com> [Accessed 11 May 2023].

<sup>112</sup> A. Padilla-Melendez, A.R. Del Aguila-Obra, *Web and Social Media Usage by Museums: Online Value Creation*.



showcased that both sources can be used for research purposes.<sup>113</sup> The asset of the SimilarWeb service for this research is that it has open public access unlike other analytical software that is available for the website owners.

I conducted SimilarWeb analytical analysis on the National Gallery Prague website [www.ngprague.cz](http://www.ngprague.cz) on 5 May 2023, and the time span of the data included three full months, from 1 January 2023 to 31 March 2023. The data set was limited to acquiring an understanding of the first three months of 2023, the most recent information available for the analysis. Data from April 2023 was not integrated because, on the date of data collection, the beginning of May 2023, the full analytics for April were not accessible yet. The SimilarWeb measurements relevant to my study are the following: the number of total visits per three months; an approximate estimate of total visits per month; monthly unique visitors that count individuals who use a website at least once in 30 days; visit duration; the number of pages per visit; visitor geography; and social media traffic that leads to a website. These markers give an insight into the overall performance of a website, the audience of a website, and the NGP online engagement effectiveness. I conduct this analysis on the websites of the other Visegrad Four countries' National Galleries and compare the performances of the websites in the region.

In the case of the National Gallery Prague, the analysis reveals that the website received a total of 137870 visits worldwide between January 2023 and March 2023. The monthly visits of the website averaged approximately 46000 per month with 29300 unique visitors, which constituted two visits per month for a unique visitor. It means that a person returned to the website at least two times in 30 days, which can be a sign of continuous engagement with the NGP. The visit duration was approximately three minutes and forty seconds. The average number of pages viewed per visit was 5.13, indicating active exploration of the website.

In terms of geographical distribution over January-March 2023, the NGP website exhibited a strong presence in the Czech Republic, with the visitors located in the Czech Republic territory contributing to 72.78% of the traffic. Other significant traffic sources included Slovakia (5.28%), the United States (2.87%), France (2.47%), and Italy (1.71%). Based on these percentages, the approximate number of visitors from each country can be counted as follows: the Czech Republic provided 100417 visitors, from Slovakia came 7284 visitors, the United States brought around 3958 visitors, 3407 visitors were involved from France, and from Italy there were 2361 visitors. However, the analytics cannot showcase the nationality of the users, thus not differentiating between tourists, expats, and the ethnic Czech population at the estimate of the geography of the

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<sup>113</sup> B.J. Jansen, Sg. Jung, Measuring user interactions with websites: A comparison of two industry standard analytics approaches using data of 86 websites in "Plos One", 2022, 17.

website visit. Thus, it is highly likely that 72.78% (100417) of the visits from the Czech Republic are not necessarily Czech citizens but also expats and tourists attending the website from the territory of the country.

Traffic from social media platforms was present on the website, confirming the engaging connection between the NGP social media and the website. Social media traffic takes 4.49% of the total website traffic in three months, while most of the visitors come from organic search in search engines, with the Google playing a crucial role. Search engines drove 62.32% of website visits from January to March 2023, which estimates for about 85998 visits. In turn, social media converted to 6183 visits, 4.49% of the total visits. The most prominent social media was Facebook accounting for 89.53% of the social media traffic in three months (5531 visits). LinkedIn brought 4.25% of the visitors (263 visits), Instagram – 3.53% (218 visits), Facebook Messenger – 1.59% (98 visits), and YouTube – 1.09% (67 visits). Overall, although social media traffic does not take a central place in website promotion, the data highlights the primary role of Facebook as the online communication platform, bringing together the website and the National Gallery Prague's social media presence.

This analysis of the NGP website's performance highlights its online presence and user engagement. The data demonstrates a considerable number of visits in three months, indicating an audience interest in the NGP's collections and exhibitions. An effective engagement with the website's content is reflected in five pages per visit. However, the visit duration time, which is three minutes per user, is rather short and most likely does not allow a deep understanding of the website content. The strongest geographical presence of the website is in the Czech Republic, with 100417 visitors in January-March 2023, and with minor influence in Slovakia, the United States, France, and Italy. This data allows me to state that the focus of the NGP website is on the local audience, either ethnically Czech or those visiting the country or staying there for a longer time frame. The social media engagement delivering traffic to the website remains rather low, with 4.49% of total visits or 6183 individuals coming from social media platforms. Nevertheless, it outlines the NGP social media activity and the success in connecting the one-to-one and one-to-many online communication channels. Overall, the NGP website [www.ngprague.cz](http://www.ngprague.cz) appears to me a central and effective online communication source that manages to bring online visitors and deliver key information about the Gallery inside the Czech Republic and even on the international scene. Having conducted the web analytics investigation that gives a hint on the NGP website functions and audience, I proceed to the content management of the website: the design, the organization, and the substance of the online channel.

The website [www.ngprague.cz](http://www.ngprague.cz) homepage features a title image of the main current event on the left side of the screen and the titles of other events and exhibitions on the right side of the screen in a form resembling a news feed and available for scrolling. When a user moves an arrow to another event without clicking, the title image changes to a corresponding head image of the event. In May 2023, the presented events are the temporary exhibition on Josef Manes called Man-Artist-Legend with a fragment of his *Twilight* as a title image; the 18th International Architecture Exhibition in Venice with a photo from the exhibition; the permanent exhibition 1939–2021: The End of the Black-and-White Era; the temporary exhibition Flower Union; the temporary exhibitions My Body Is Not an Island; the permanent exhibition 1956–1989: Architecture for All; the temporary exhibition ZENGA – Japanese Zen Paintings from the Kaeru-An Collection; the temporary exhibition In Depth and on the Surface on the Middle Ages; Online Collections; the permanent exhibition 1918–1938: First Czechoslovak Republic; the permanent exhibition 1796–1918: Art of the Long Century; two permanent exhibitions Old Masters in Schwarzenberg Palace and Sternberg Palace; the permanent exhibition Medieval Art in Bohemia and Central Europe 1200–1550. The range of events covers many implications of the National Gallery Prague. It includes permanent exhibitions of collections from medieval to contemporary art; it devotes an exhibition to the development of the Czech state and the 2023 Czech presidency of the European Union; it engages with the present social problems of the race and body; it creates international connections of the Czech art scene; and it presents the national art and artists. From the first page of the website one can understand the themes and engagements of the National Gallery Prague which vary from the Fine arts to the social challenges and the national political scene. In the same section, the website includes links to Facebook, Instagram, and Youtube and the suggestion to subscribe to the NGP newsletter.

The website is divided into three sections: Exhibitions and Events, Public Programmes, and About Us. These sections outline the three communication lines that the Gallery follows: the presentation of its central products, the interpretation of the products through the public programs designed for different audiences, and the narration about the NGP itself. In the first sections, one can find the list of permanent and temporary exhibitions as well as the events connected to the exhibitions: guided tours and lectures. In the second section, the Gallery tells about the opportunities for the different social groups to enjoy the Gallery services. There the NGP highlights various education formats that take place at the Gallery. It offers art mediation and interpretation events for adults, e.g., workshops and art history courses. For children, the Gallery suggests fine arts playrooms and workshops, weekend activities, and vacation art studios. Moreover, the NGP provides special programs for school groups and events for teachers, e.g.,

seminars and courses on the methodology of art mediation and online study materials related to the exhibitions. The section About Us is the most diverse on the website. It includes information on the buildings and history, admissions and opening hours, job offers and management, news, visitors with specific needs, professional activities, venues for hire, contacts and press. The overview of the website organization allows outlining the content present on the NGP central online communication channel. The implication is that the Gallery develops online content dedicated to three themes: exhibitions, educational activities and organizational information about the institution.

The website makes it clear that exhibitions are the central product of the National Gallery Prague. In the section Exhibition and Events, the Gallery devotes separate pages to enlist temporary and permanent exhibitions. The home page of the website does not showcase all the current events and rather chooses the most relevant or the newest exhibition to include on the very first page of [www.ngprague.cz](http://www.ngprague.cz). In this paragraph, I take a look at how the Gallery organizes the narration about the exhibitions. Every temporary or permanent exhibition has a separate webpage following a common structure. An exhibition's webpage first highlights the fragment or full reproduction of one of the paintings included in the exhibition. Then it features a title in a large bold font and a date and location in bold font. The text describing an exhibition follows, which often includes the reasons for the development of an exhibition, its central concepts around which the exhibition narrative is developed, the artists, and the themes of their work. Finally, the end of the page presents up to ten reproductions of paintings. Some of the pages of the exhibitions also show photographs of the exhibition halls, contributing to the connection between the NGP online space and the physical space of action. However, the practice of demonstrating exhibition halls is rare on the webpages about the exhibitions, and in most cases, the illustrations are limited to reproductions. The texts about the exhibitions avoid descriptions of paintings and do not indicate that the reproductions available on a webpage are key elements or the main curiosities of an exhibition. Apart from the information on the author, the title, and the date indicated below a reproduction, the NGP does not disclose information about the value of a painting or an art historian analysis, as some galleries do. There are also no references to particular artworks in the exhibition texts. The NGP limits the exhibition texts to naming the artists, short facts from their biographies, and the prominent motifs in their oeuvre, leaving the paintings to be discovered during a visit. In the end, the webpages about the exhibitions always refer either to a curator or a team of key specialists involved in the curatorship of an exhibition.

The webspace dedicated to collections, the foundation of any museum, follows the same structure. The National Gallery Prague has five collections: the Collection of Old Masters, the

Collection of 19th Century Art and Classical Modernism, the Collection of Modern and Contemporary Art, the Collection of Prints and Drawings, and the Collection of Asian Art. The texts about the collections indicate an approximate number of pieces, enlist the artists whose works are included, refer to the history of a collection, and inscribe the collection into a wider frame of a historical period the artworks represent (e.g., Middle Ages or the Second World War). The reproductions supplementing the texts count up to twenty pieces and again have no mention of their value or another reasoning on why they were chosen to represent a collection. The narrative about the collections is similar to an inventory of the artists and works from different art periods available at the Gallery. In the texts, the NGP shows the connection between the development of the Czech collection of fine arts and the Czech and global history as a process where the National Gallery Prague has obtained extensive art funds. The webpages about the collections include the link to the NGP Online Collections, which is a digital archive of the NGP funds. According to the Online Collection webspace, the goal of the database is to provide online access to the NGP collection with an opportunity to view the artworks in high resolution, learn the technical details about an artwork (e.g., material, technique, size), and access curatorial texts describing an art piece, the author's background, and the time period. The Online Collection can be classified by location, artwork features, or a common theme. One way to study the Online Collection is to address it by a building that hosts a particular part of the NGP collection when one can see online the artworks available in a building. Additionally, there is short information about the history of the building, its architectural value, and the start date of its affiliation with the National Gallery Prague. It can be seen as another technique to connect the space of action with the online space of the Gallery. The classification by artwork features implements the possibility of sorting the database by collection, technique, artist, or material. Thematic categorization suggests pre-sorted artworks related to a particular topic, e.g., an artist, a motif, a region, or a time frame. For instance, the current available thematic categories include the following: Rembrandt and Dutch Printmaking of the 17th Century; The African Adventure of Wenceslaus Hollar; Nicolas Poussin. His Work in Three Centuries of Graphic Art and the other.

Overall, the study of the content of the National Gallery Prague reveals the communication points used by the Gallery to construct its online space. First, the connection to a physical space, the place of action, is recurrent throughout the website, not only in the sections dedicated to the venues but also on every exhibition or event page and in the Online Collection database. Thus, reference to the Gallery's space appears to be crucial in the need to maintain the linkage to the environment of the NGP through the textual narration, description, and images. The website invites the visitor to come to the Gallery. Another frequent theme is a connection to the history of the

Czech nation and global history. Artworks and exhibitions are perceived as a part of the past since the narrative includes appeals to the dates, historical personalities, different eras in history, and art periods. The website is keen on presenting the detailed story of the institutionalization of the Gallery and the collection development in connection to the history of the Czech state, emphasizing its position as a state institution responsible for national art. Moreover, the Gallery stays in touch with the present circumstances. It dedicates events and exhibitions to the current societal changes. Remarkably, it holds a project Flower Union devoted to the 2022 Czech presidency in the European Union, which underlines a clear connection to the state. The contact with the general public, the visitors, is in the focus of the NGP website as well. It offers public programs for different ages and interests and pays special attention to the schools and teachers. The mission to educate seems to be as vital as the task to present and interpret national and global art. The website can be seen as an extensive educational portal with a variety of materials related to art and tied to the history of the Czech nation. The care about the visitors with specific needs is apparent as the website has several resources doubled in the Czech sign language. The Gallery additionally offers tactile exhibitions and the podcast series *The Sound of Art*. The website, as a part of the NGP online program, corresponds to its task to bring the Gallery closer to visitors, inform about the events, and present the collections and the exhibitions: “Through our website and social networks, we create a digital communication channel that tries to minimize barriers for viewers as much as possible and thus bring quality art-themed content beyond the boundaries of our buildings”.<sup>114</sup> The National Gallery Prague website is a multidimensional online communication channel where the content related to the Gallery finds its place. It has many themes varying from the NGP history to NGP venues available for private events. The website uses narration, description, and images to create the National Gallery Prague online space and incorporate the history, art mediation, visitor information, agenda updates, institutional documents, and professional services.

The analysis of the National Gallery Prague website content outlines the themes present in the Gallery’s online communication and narration: the history, the space, the public, and the social changes. I conduct the word frequency analysis to deepen the understanding of the texts as the central communication medium available on the website. The total words in an English version of the National Gallery Prague website include 79246 units. The top five most frequently used words are the following:

1. Art – 1604 times;

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<sup>114</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/exhibitions-and-events/ngp-online> [Accessed 20 May 2023].

2. Gallery – 958 times;
3. Exhibition – 923 times;
4. National – 851 times;
5. Prague – 715 times.

The code “art”, the most frequent word on the NGP website, articulates the various forms of visual art, including painting, sculpture, new media, and architecture. This code is omnipresent on the website texts, and it can be expected because engaging with art is a central purpose of the Gallery as laid out in the Statute of the National Gallery Prague.<sup>115</sup> It is used as an umbrella term when relating to artworks, art periods, the oeuvre, and collections. The gallery applies the word to describe the exhibitions’ content and provide information about the artists and art movements that are a part of the gallery's collection. The code also appears in the educational section of the website, suggesting that the National Gallery Prague contributes to using artworks as a means of learning. The educational content of the website offers information about events, guided tours, and other resources aimed at fostering a deeper understanding of the visual art and gallery’s collections. Pages dedicated to collections include descriptions of the artworks along with high-quality images and information about the author, year of creation, and historical context where the art is in focus. The code “art” is thus connected to the categories of exhibitions, educational activities, and the NGP collections.

The code “gallery” is the second most frequent unit on the website. This word is used to refer to the National Gallery Prague itself. Despite the collocation “National Gallery Prague” was excluded from the textual data, the code is still apparent. The website commonly uses the word to describe the institution and to mention the Gallery in organizational or managerial matters. The incidence of this code is dense in the sections related to the history and establishment of the institution as well as to collections, the topic related to the core part of the Gallery. The other dense category is the navigational issues, such as the location, the admission rules, and the news about the events scheduled at the Gallery.

The third most frequent code is “exhibition” which is used to appeal to the main product of the gallery, the exhibitions. The word is often used in conjunction with the names of specific artists, art movements, or themes to describe the content of the exhibition. There it refers to the subject of an exhibition, e.g., artists or time periods that an exhibition tells about. Moreover, the

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<sup>115</sup> Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, *Statute of the National Gallery in Prague*, 21 April 2020, <https://ngp-prod.brainz.cz/storage/2756/Statute-of-the-NGP.pdf>

code is connected to the visitor activities, for instance, in phrases like “...an exhibition can offer an interactive experience” and other similar sentences explaining what can be done during an exhibition visit.<sup>116</sup> Apart from the self-reference of the code explaining the exhibitions, it is also visible in the category of the news about the openings of fresh exhibitions. The final remarkable category displayed in the code exhibition is the story of the design of an exhibition and its narrative development. Here the website tells about the reasoning and the central concepts behind an exhibition: why it was settled and where the collection or the idea came from. This category can be seen as a summary of curatorship, giving a hint on what to expect or how to read an exhibition.

The “national” is the fourth keyword of the website as the NGP represents the national art and the collection that has been developing in the Czech lands since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The definition of the National Gallery Prague underlines its status and its special relation to national art: “The National Gallery Prague is the largest and most important art institution in the Czech Republic that cares about the national art treasure and heritage”.<sup>117</sup> The code is mostly connected to the descriptions in the sections of exhibitions or collections. There the “national” is mentioned in the connection to Czech artists or art periods. The collections category is the brightest in relation to this code. It enlists the national art treasures found in the collections and highlights the national nature of the collections meaning its long connection to the Czech people or institutions contributing to its development.

Lastly, the fifth frequent word on the NGP website is “Prague”, the capital city of the Czech Republic. The categories it embodies are the location, as the website often refers to the navigation to the Gallery and highlights the venues in the texts related to all the exhibitions or other public events. Another theme is the relation to the city itself, mostly when narrating about the Gallery buildings: “...oldest Gothic structures in Prague”.<sup>118</sup> Another example can be the connection to other city’s landmarks: “...adjoining Prague’s Archbishops’ Palace”.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, the word “Prague” is visible when identifying various Czech organizations with which the Gallery collaborates, e.g., universities. This way, the Gallery maps itself among other symbolic Prague locations and inscribes itself into the geographical and institutional network of Prague’s public organizations.

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<sup>116</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/event/258/the-buddha-up-close> [Accessed 24 May 2023].

<sup>117</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en> [Accessed 24 May 2023].

<sup>118</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/about/buildings/convent-of-st-agnes-of-bohemia> [Accessed 24 May 2023].

<sup>119</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/about/buildings/sternberg-palace> [Accessed 24 May 2023].



This content analysis based on the word frequency count and the contextualization of the most frequent words revealed the network of themes within the National Gallery Prague website [www.ngprague.cz](http://www.ngprague.cz). The code “art” has the widest connection to the categories of exhibitions, education, and collections. The code “gallery” has ties to the categories of the NGP history, the NGP as an institution, and visitor navigation. The code “exhibition” is interconnected with the code “art”. Moreover, it relates to the categories of visitor activities and curatorship. The code “national” appeals to the categories of exhibitions and collections, including the history of collections. The code “Prague” has two functions. It navigates the visitors to the Gallery. And it places the Gallery in the city as a part of the urban landscape, considering both the narration about the buildings and the connections with the partner organizations. Overall, the detected patterns showcase that the themes present on the website are interconnected, especially the ones relating to the umbrella word art and the exhibitions. Moreover, the collections is another interrelated category, embodying art, national reflections, and the Gallery institutionalization. The theme of the history of the Gallery and collections is also frequent on the website. The indication of the location in the form of the reference to the city or the visitor navigation is remarkable as an attempt to hold the Gallery in focus as a space of action. The attention to the visitors is noticeable, as the themes of education and visitor activities stand amongst the most significant on the website. Hence, the National Gallery Prague website most spread topics include art, exhibitions, collection, visitor services, the national, the Gallery, and Prague. These topics overlap and the Gallery develops the amalgam online discourse that includes many engagements of the NGP.

The content analysis of the temporary exhibition texts of the National Gallery Prague website allows to deepen the scope and reveal differences between the whole website discourse and the narration on the fixed-term recent exhibitions. Temporary exhibitions in their nature are tied to the discourse around them and promotional strategies in order to succeed. They are open for a fixed period of time which makes the online communication time-limited and makes the gallery promote it more excessively than a permanent exhibition. They usually have a more vivid and time-fixed reaction from the public.<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, they influence the image of a national gallery and contribute to the image-creation of a gallery that is closely linked to the representation of national art and identity through art.

The data set is the texts dedicated to 2020-2023 temporary exhibitions at the NGP. The total amount of words in the texts is 10145 words. The five most frequent words are the following:

1. Works – 89 words;

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<sup>120</sup> A. Desvallées, *Key concepts of Museology*.

2. Exhibition – 75 words;
3. Artists – 67 words;
4. Prints – 52 words;
5. Czech – 30 words.

These codes highlight that, as revealed in the content analysis before, the category of exhibitions has a strong connection to the umbrella term art. These most frequent words relate to elements of art or art mediations. It is also visible that the temporary exhibitions texts are focused on exhibition subjects: art pieces and artists.

The code “works” in its meaning is synonymous to pieces or art, artworks, and paintings. This code is thus used as an umbrella definition to indicate the content of an exhibition. It has three categories that it is applied to: the works of an artist, the motifs present in the works, and the organization of an exhibition around the selected works. The code underlines that it is important for the Gallery to explain in detail an exhibition’s subject and give an overview of what the exhibition is dedicated to.

The code “exhibition” is the most apparent in the presentation of an exhibition theme. The frequent collocations are: “the exhibition presents...”, “the exhibition observes...”, “the exhibition offers...”, “the exhibition deals with...” and other similar phrases. Curiously, the grammar structure of these sentences gives actorship to an exhibition itself being the subject of the phrase regulating the verb. The presentation concerns subjects of exhibitions and links it to pieces of art or artists exposed. Another use of this code relates to the space of an exhibition to indicate what kind of environment it designs and what can be found within. Visitors are in the focus of this code as well, with the text refereeing to the offers and activities available at an exhibition. Comparing the categories that the code “exhibition” is related to in the temporary exhibition texts to the “exhibition” code outlined in the whole website textual analysis, it is seen that the categories overlap. Both analyses display that the code “exhibition” regards visitor activities and art elements. However, the categories of curatorship and spatiality are less apparent, with the first one being visible in the whole website scope and the latter being a focus of the temporary exhibition texts.

The code “artists” shows another relation to a subject of an exhibition. This code refers to either the peculiarities of an artist’s oeuvre: the significant themes in the art, the unique painting techniques, or the revolutionizing approach to a theme. The second category is an appeal to a biography of an artist, telling the important fact from the life that affected the work. This code proves the focus of temporary exhibitions on the detailed presentation of an exhibition’s theme

and subject. It also corresponds to the previous observation that texts dedicated to exhibitions tend to extensively explain its main characters.

The code “prints” is a manifestation of a special pride of the National Gallery Prague, the Prints and Drawings Collection. It stands amongst the largest and most prestigious collections of prints and drawings in Europe. It is the largest collection the National Gallery has to offer, with over 400,000 prints, drawings, and illuminated manuscript fragments from the Middle Ages to the present.<sup>121</sup> The reason for the frequency of the code is that over the three years, the Gallery held thirteen short-term exhibitions related to print art. Additionally, the prints are a frequent supplement to the other exhibitions of the gallery. In terms of categories, the code “prints” is used to indicate the content of an exhibition, with prints being amongst the other pieces displayed. The other appearance of this code is in connection to the Prints and Drawings Collection when explaining the origin of the print or the way the collection contributed to an exhibition. The third category for this code is the curatorial description of the motifs depicted in the prints.

The code “Czech” highlights the frequency of the national topic in temporary exhibitions. It underlines the connection to the state institutions: ministries, universities, and the Czech Republic itself. It refers to the Czech way of doing things, e.g., in collocations as “Czech Christmas”, “Czech culture”, “Czech approach”, and “typical Czech awareness”.<sup>122</sup> It is also widely used to indicate Czech artists and authors. This code highlights the stronger display and the emphasis on particularly Czech art in the themes and texts of temporary exhibitions. On the scale of the whole website, the code “Czech” is outperformed by the code “national”. However, both relate to similar topics. The code “national” rather refers to the establishment of the NGP collection and the history of art in the Czech Republic. The code “Czech” directly clues the national belonging of the artworks and artists, the institutions collaborating with the Gallery. Furthermore, the code adds a new dimension – the presentation of Czech general culture and worldview.

The content analysis of the temporary exhibition texts on the National Gallery Prague website enabled me to explore and identify the specific narratives that are a part of the discourse on 2020-2023 fixed-term exhibitions. The most frequent words and their connected categories demonstrate that the texts about temporary exhibitions put emphasis on the detailed presentation of exhibition themes and the significance of artists and their works. Furthermore, unlike in the texts from the whole website, the prominence of Czech art, culture, and national themes in the

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<sup>121</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/about/collections/collection-of-prints-and-drawings> [Accessed 24 May 2023]

<sup>122</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/exhibitions-and-events/exhibitions> [Accessed 24 May 2023]

temporary exhibitions at the NGP is accentuated. Overall, the online texts of temporary exhibitions represent a summary of an exhibition. Regarding the codes “prints” and “Czech”, these units appear as the recurring content of a temporary exhibition where the Gallery creates the relation to prints as outstanding treasures of the NGP collections and the Czech as an accent in an exhibition.

### **The National Gallery Prague interaction management analysis**

In the interaction management analysis, I turn to the interactive elements and opportunities of the National Gallery Prague website [www.ngprague.cz](http://www.ngprague.cz). Additionally, I outline the social media climate in the Gallery’s online communication. These dimensions allow me to address the user engagement techniques implemented by the NGP.

Interactive website elements are the tools that allow a user to participate: post, message actively, engage in a conversation, tailor the content to their preferences, or play.<sup>123</sup> The NGP website offers few interaction tools. The website interface does not imply much user participation apart from the section Exhibitions and Events, where a visitor can sort the information feed in the categories: All, Exhibitions, Permanent Exhibitions, Guided Tours, Lectures and Discussions, For Families and Children, Special Events, NGP Online, Podcast. Moreover, the classification by time is available: ongoing, today, tomorrow, this week, or a calendar where one can choose a date or a time span. Also, a user can choose a gallery’s building to check the events going there. The pages about exhibitions offer a small interactive bar with the function of adding an event to a personal Google Calendar and a link to a venue page leading to Google Maps to indicate the precise location. The webpage Contacts simply enlists the email addresses and rather opens the communication possibility than invites for an interaction.

However, every website page at the page bottom has the National Gallery Prague Club of Friends clickable button directing a user to the NGP Club of Friends page. The goal of this program is to build a community around the Gallery: “membership program with the aim to create a community of lovers of art and all supporters of the National Gallery Prague. Its activities contribute to the support of NGP and to the care of our cultural heritage”.<sup>124</sup> The page offers different types of paid memberships with benefits. The interactivity of this page is in the possibility to choose and purchase a membership. The membership implies further engagement with the Gallery outside of the online realm. It offers special gatherings, unlimited access to exhibitions, admission to the NGP guided tours, and discount on the Gallery courses. As part of the online engagement, the membership brings the subscription to the regular Member’s newsletter. Despite

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<sup>123</sup> R. Garrett, J. Chiu, *A Literature Review: Website Design and User Engagement* in “Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies”, 2016, 6, pp. 1-14.

<sup>124</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/club-of-friends> [Accessed 25 May 2023]

the active promotion of the NGP Club of Friends through the website, the practices of community building happen offline, and the online interactivity remains at the level of one-to-many communication via email.

The most interactive part of the website is the National Gallery Prague Online Collection. The depository allows sorting the archive by collection, artist, technique, and material. The time period search is also available. When accessing an artwork, one can zoom and scroll it up to the tiniest detail accessing the relevant part of an art piece. The high quality of the digitized reproductions contributes to the experience of online archive browsing.

Social media, as many-to-many communication domains, bring more opportunities for user interaction. The National Gallery Prague is present on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. All these accounts are managed in the Czech language. According to SimilarWeb analytics, Facebook is the most active of the Gallery's social media, and four percent of the website visitors come from Facebook (5531 visitors in three months). The Facebook page of the NGP has 45 000 followers. The content on the Facebook account complements the website's content regarding recent events and exhibitions. The Gallery uses Facebook as a tool to spread information and invite social media users. Once a week, the NGP posts a summary of the planned events. The summary has links to the page of an event on the website where one can sign up or buy a ticket. Also, it regularly posts about the ongoing current exhibitions, supplementing the texts with video content or additional images not available on the website. Sometimes it posts the behind-the-scenes of an exhibition. In terms of user interaction, the liking and sharing functions are a part of the Facebook interface, and some users employ them. The number of likes under a publication varies from approximately 20 likes to 250 likes. The comments section is even less active, from around ten comments under a publication to zero comments under some posts. The Gallery replies to some of the comments; however, not to all of them. Also, the Gallery provides extensive video content in the Czech language, including short clips and longer videos. The average number of views is around 1000, and the most successful videos have around 20000 views. The situation is similar with the Instagram account of the National Gallery Prague. The content is doubled there from a Facebook account, including videos and publications. The account is slightly less popular: it has 34000 followers. Nevertheless, the video views are more successful on Instagram. The average video has around 5000 views, and the most-seen video has 241000 views. The reason might be that Instagram allows only short clips, and the network algorithms work better in spreading video materials. Additionally, the Gallery uses the Instagram tool called Guides, which makes space for the development of longer coherent publications. The Guides available on the NGP Instagram page double the key content of the website: the Buildings, the Exhibitions, and the Permanent

Exhibitions. The extra Guides are the following: Do You Have a Minute presents the temporary exhibitions; Intimacy as Resistance, dedicated to a festival and featuring artists and their work; and Books representing the print materials of the NGP. The instrument Stories depicts even more snapshots from exhibitions, events, and the NGP daily life. The Gallery also reposts related Stories of the visitors. In contrast to Facebook, the NGP Instagram page offers the hashtag “ngprague” as an interactive tool. When someone uses a hashtag, Instagram adds a post to the pool of other publications under the same hashtag. This way, the social network around the National Gallery Prague is created and shared, as anyone can access the hashtag and see the post and opinions on the visitor’s experience at the NGP. The YouTube account of the Gallery presents short and longer videos supplementing the current exhibitions. Additionally, it offers podcast episodes and some videos dubbed in the Czech sign language. It also attempts to create a coherent narrative with videos by developing thematic playlists: Cycle of Online Lectures, Workshops and Educational Videos for Kids; and Records of Lectures. Most of the video content is in the Czech language. Some videos have English subtitles. The YouTube account is the smallest one and it has only 2690 followers. The most seen video has around 2000 views and the average videos have around 500 views.

The investigation of the NGP online interactive instruments reveals a low level of online interactivity. The website is a strictly one-to-many communication channel and does not involve possibilities for direct interaction between a user and the Gallery. The NGP social media display more interaction opportunities as social networks are a core part of Web 2.0, the environment manifesting user participation and interoperability. The Instagram account is the most interactive among other NGP’s social media pages. The interactivity is conditioned by the Instagram instruments providing participation that the Gallery uses. However, even the Instagram account does not display many examples of the dialogue, with the comments section being mostly empty. Generally, social media support the website agenda. The Gallery develops a homogeneous online communication and uses the website and social media as the delivering channels. The substance of the content and themes displayed on the website and social media are identical, and the mediums vary slightly. The website uses texts and images, while the social media accounts offer videos and additional photographs devoted to the same topics. In terms of the form of message, social media is more diverse in contrast to the standardized and structured website.

### **The social role of the National Gallery Prague**

The Statute on the National Gallery Prague states that the key elements of its mission are public services of managing the collection, related research activities, exhibiting, and educational endeavours: “The Organisation was established for the purpose of providing services of public

benefit and public cultural services and for the purpose of acquiring, collecting, permanently protecting, recording and professionally processing collections of museum character and making them available to the public, of conducting scientific research relating to the collections and the environment from which the collection items were obtained, of disseminating the results of research and development through teaching, publications, the creation of museum exhibits and functional presentations of exhibits and programmes, especially in an international context”.<sup>125</sup> The National Gallery Prague website reflects these tasks. Apart from the obvious engagement with the collection and many of the ongoing temporary and permanent exhibitions, the website extensively talks about education and research opportunities.

In the section Audience Development the website points out the significance of educational activities for the Gallery: “Our programmes provide refinement, education, experience, spiritual and aesthetic enrichment, and new art perspectives, fostering respect for difference, broadening horizons, and helping you spend free time meaningfully. . . . Educational activities have been a feature of the National Gallery Prague since as early as the 1960s”.<sup>126</sup> The gallery offers educational programs of great variety and forms. There are events for adults that include guided tours, art history courses, lectures and discussions, workshops, and performances. For the professional public, the NGP provides research services and access to the library and the NGP archives. Children can attend fine arts playrooms and creative workshops where they can make art of their own. The regular studios for children from the age of six operate in the Gallery. It is a more advanced level of art education, where in connection to the exhibited objects, children can learn, experiment, and try different approaches to art mediation. Schoolchildren and teachers are also a part of the educational scope of the Gallery: “It is a crucial aspect of our educational activities to mediate art to school groups and teachers”.<sup>127</sup> The NGP offers special programs for school groups of different levels with the elements of creative activity, discussions, drama, and project work. Teachers can access tailored study materials for their classes as well as methodology events, seminars, and courses. The public programs devoted to education demonstrate appear to be highly participative. The Gallery develops educational events to connect different social groups to art and to spread art mediation practices to the public. The website and social media aid this purpose by publishing regular updates about the NGP events.

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<sup>125</sup> Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, *Statute of the National Gallery in Prague*, 21 April 2020, <https://ngp-prod.brainz.cz/storage/2756/Statute-of-the-NGP.pdf>

<sup>126</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/about/page/public-programming> [Accessed 25 May 2023]

<sup>127</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/education/education-schools> [Accessed 25 May 2023]

The less obvious stance of the National Gallery Prague's social role is the development of the social space for discussion and reflection. There is no separate section of the website that would highlight it. Nevertheless, the references to the NGP as a social space and the reflections on social problems are the recurring themes of the website. The audience development section states: "In the gallery, we create an open space for the meeting and intertwining of artworks, curators, artists, specialists from various social fields, and the general public".<sup>128</sup> Throughout the website, the texts refer to the Gallery as "a space for education, discussion, and experiences", "a living space", "a meeting space ideal for a dialogue" and other phrases with similar connotation. The NGP highlights its motivations to organize an environment where people can meet, talk, learn, and reflect in connection to art. The reflections on the social problems are displayed through the recent agenda of the NGP temporary exhibitions. The ongoing temporary exhibitions touch upon the social constructs (Eva Kořátková: My Body Is Not an Island), the art as a representation of the time (1939–2021: The End of the Black-and-White Era), the political development (Flower Union), the computer tomography of artworks (In Depth and on the Surface). A bright example of the NGP's attempt to stay alert for the present-day challenges is a short-term festival exhibition MOVE: Culture Club – Collective Bodies, featured in collaboration with the Centre Pompidou in October 2022. The exhibition ruminated on the consequences of the pandemic and the social distancing influence of society and individual lives. These implications find proven in an interview with Alicja Knast, the General Director of the National Gallery Prague. In the 2021 interview to Artalk.cz, the Czech magazine about contemporary visual art and a web project which reflects on the regional art scene, Alicja Knast shared the aspirations of the NGP to become more connected to society: "we haven't done enough as the cultural sector to show the impact of culture and its relevance for the development of society".<sup>129</sup>

The National Gallery Prague is keen on presenting its mission and stating why they matter as a public institution. The NGP underlines its function as a space of social interaction. It highlights that the Gallery not only serves as an art collection but takes the lead in creating a space available for the general public to discuss and interact. The social focus of the Gallery includes a significant strategy to educate its visitors through participative programs, to provide an interactive environment for social discussion, and to develop exhibitions that recognize and reflect on social problems.

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<sup>128</sup> The National Gallery Prague Website <https://www.ngprague.cz/en/about/page/public-programming> [Accessed 25 May 2023]

<sup>129</sup> „We will be changed for good” – An interview with Alicja Knast <https://artportal.hu/magazin/we-will-be-changed-for-good-an-interview-with-alicja-knast/> [Accessed 25 May 2023]



## **Conclusion on online communication analysis of the National Gallery Prague**

In the analysis of the National Gallery Prague website [www.ngprague.cz](http://www.ngprague.cz) as a central online communication channel I address the following points: the narrative about the history and the locations of the NGP, SimilarWeb metrics, the website content, the website textual data and the texts about temporary exhibitions, the online interactive instruments, social media, and the narrative about the social role of the Gallery. By referencing Czech historical events and highlighting the connection between the past and the present, the National Gallery Prague outlines its significance as an organization that engages in the interpretation of national history through art. The narrative about the Gallery's locations supports this image and accentuates the status, the extensiveness of collections, and the involvement with tangible heritage along with art. The analytics about the website revealed that it is an efficient online communication channel that attracts users and disseminates information about the Gallery both domestically and internationally, managing to include social media in the communication on a smaller scale. The analysis of the website content discovers that it serves as a multifaceted communication medium that covers a wide range of topics. Incorporating history, art interpretation, agenda updates, institutional documents, and professional services, the website uses narration, description, and images to create the online space for the National Gallery Prague. The content analysis of the website executed through word frequency analysis and thematic encoding displays that the most used words alongside with the connected categories shape the biggest thematic parents. The National Gallery Prague website predominantly focuses on art, exhibitions, collections, visitor services, and national aspects. These interconnected topics create a comprehensive online scene that presents the various engagements of the NGP. The investigation of the temporary exhibitions' texts features that they place a strong emphasis on the presentation of artists and their works, as well as the thorough explanation of exhibition themes. The temporary exhibition texts are focused on Czech art. A low level of online interactivity is found in the analysis of the NGP's website interactive tools, while the NGP social media are more interactive. The website serves as a central hub for delivering information, while social media platforms provide additional opportunities for user engagement and participation.

The interview with the Head of the Department of Visual and Digital Communication of the Gallery supported these implications. The main tasks of the National Gallery Prague online communication are to maintain the identity of a museum by promoting the exhibitions and reaching the audience. The interviewee stressed that the Gallery seeks to expand beyond the national art and implement the social reflections into its initiatives, which online communication supports. The interviewee mentioned that the audience responded well to these attempts and the

exhibitions dedicated to social changes had gained unexpected popularity. The educational role of the Gallery also was a subject of a dialogue. It is important for the Gallery to develop educational programs and enrich the knowledge of their visitors.

The Gallery manifests its public role through visitor education and the development of social interaction space together with reflexive exhibitions. Overall, the National Gallery Prague's online presence communicates its history, exhibitions, collections, and engagement with national and social themes.

## **The Hungarian National Gallery online communication**

According to its website, the Hungarian national gallery (HNG) defines itself as the wide-scale organization responsible for storing, preserving, and exhibiting Hungarian fine art and its history: “The Hungarian National Gallery is the largest public collection documenting and presenting the rise and development of the fine arts in Hungary. It has operated as an independent institution since 1957”.<sup>130</sup> In this chapter, I focus on the HNG website [en.mng.hu](https://en.mng.hu) online content provided in the English language, which is targeted at an international non-Hungarian audience. The English language version of the website has a different URL address from the Hungarian version. It means that there are two separate websites, not a translated version of the original Hungarian-language website. The versions are not completely identical, and there is some information present on the Hungarian website and missing from the English language one. As I know Hungarian on a basic level, I was able to identify the differences, and I discuss them during the analysis.

### **The Hungarian National Gallery as a landmark**

The website dedicates one page to the history of the Gallery and the location description. The Hungarian text consists of 7635 characters, while the English has 6854 characters. The texts are separated into four parts: Buda Castle, History of the Museum, The Habsburg Palatine Crypt, and The Dome. The Gallery cares about explaining the address and the ways to reach it in the website. One can find the address of the Gallery as well as a small map leading to Google Maps at the bottom of every website page. Additionally, the section Getting Here of the Visit part displays a detailed text on the routes to the Gallery by walk, by public transport, and for disabled visitors. Also, the page presents air view images of the Royal Palace with indications of the Hungarian National Gallery entrances and the other key parts of the Castle (e.g., the Habsburg Gate, the Lion’s Court, or the Funicular). In relation to the HNG location, the website offers supplementary services: the rent of the venue for private events and the commercial facilities such as MuseumCafe and MuseumShop.

The English language version of the website tells about the history of the Gallery as an independent institution as starting from 1957. The HNG drives the timeline from 1957 to 2005 including short sentences about the milestones in the institution’s development. Commencing from 1957 and based on the collection of the New Hungarian Picture Gallery, the website refers to the initial size of the funds: “6000 paintings, 2100 sculptures, 3100 medals, 11,000 drawings, and 5000 prints”.<sup>131</sup> Then the text mentions the relocation to Buda Palace in 1975, after the Palace

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<sup>130</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://en.mng.hu/> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

<sup>131</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://en.mng.hu/about-the-museum/> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

refurbishings that had been going on since 1959. In the ongoing years, the Gallery opened its permanent exhibitions: Panel Paintings and Wooden Sculptures from the Mediaeval Period and Baroque Art in Hungary in 1979; Late Gothic Winged Altarpieces in 1982; Mediaeval and Renaissance Stone Carvings in 1985. 1989 is the year when the Habsburg Palatines crypt became available for public access. The last statement about the Gallery's history mentions the 2005 expansion of the exhibition space by acquiring the Building A of the Royal Castle.

In comparison to the same text on the Hungarian National Gallery history in the Hungarian language, the English language text omits several points. First, it presents a wider history of the collection's development. The text explains that the collection originates from the Hungarian National Museum, dating back to 1802. In 1896 with the foundation of the Museum of Fine Arts, the Art Collection was transferred there and separated from the Hungarian National Museum, which was a typical process for the Hungarian museology of the time. However, the rapid growth of Hungarian artworks in the 1920s made it necessary to divide the Hungarian and international collections. This led to the creation of the New Hungarian Gallery of the Museum of Fine Arts in 1928, which showcased the art from the Nagybánya School and subsequent periods in a separate building within the same institution. This collection is only briefly mentioned in an English text without a date of establishment. By 1953 due to the expansion of the Hungarian art collection, there was less opportunity to present it comprehensively at the Museum of Fine Arts. Hence, there was a growing necessity to develop an independent museum with a focus on Hungarian art. Second, the English text does not mention the connection of the Gallery's establishment to the 1956 revolution, after which the idea of establishing a separate Hungarian art museum solidified in Hungarian cultural management. Lastly, the English language text does not refer to the latest changes in the Hungarian National Gallery structure, unlike the Hungarian version of the website. The 2012 reunification of the Museum of Fine Arts and the Hungarian National Gallery into one institution led to the refocus of the Gallery to include the artworks from the international collection of the Museum of Fine Arts. The Hungarian National Gallery will host the Collection of International Art after 1800 on a permanent basis, after the current ongoing restoration works. The temporary exhibition From Delacroix to Vasarely – Collection of International Art after 1800 is already open to the public. Another important point omitted from the English language text is the current size of the HNG collection – 110000 artworks.<sup>132</sup> The rest of the texts in the webpage (Buda Castle, The Habsburg Palatine Crypt, and The Dome) are identical. The implication is that the omitted parts of the history were considered irrelevant for non-Hungarian readers. And there

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<sup>132</sup>The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://mng.hu/a-muzeumrol/> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

is a chance that the latest update, the 2012 reunification, has not been incorporated into the original English language texts published at the website launch.

The narrative about the location includes the Royal Palace Buda Castle and its part meaningful for the visitors: the Habsburg Palatine Crypt and the Dome. The Royal Palace is described as an exceptional venue connected to the Medieval history of Hungary and to the great kings: “The history of the Royal Palace in the Buda Castle, which was at that time recognized as a magnificent royal residence in Europe, dates back to the 14th century, the reign of kings Louis the Great, Sigismund, and Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490)”.<sup>133</sup> Then the text informs about the many damages and restorations that the Castle first experienced during the Turkish occupation (from 1541), the Battle of Buda (1686), and the Second World War. The latest restoration was conducted in the 1960-1970s. The short paragraph describing the Royal Palace in the Buda Castle highlights its long connection to the rulers of Hungary. Amongst the line of rulers, the reign of King Matthias Corvinus holds a special place, claimed as a “Great Power” and “Renaissance State”, with Matthias Corvinus considered to be a founder of the most glorious era of Hungary according to the Hungarian self-confidence construction and the attempts to mythologize the history of the nation.<sup>134</sup> Thus, the reference to Matthias Corvinus in the text about the Royal Palace underlines its significance as a residence of one of the key figures for the Hungarian nation. The attention to the destruction and restoration of the Palace manifests the historical ruptures in Hungary, with Turkish occupation and the Second World War being the most severe ones. Also, it related to the loss of the original condition of the Palace.

The narrative about the Habsburg Palatine Crypt has two dominant motives: the nostalgia for the lost beauty of the Palace and the nostalgia or care for the Habsburg Palatine. The text describes the interior design features of the Crypt as the closest to the original amongst other spaces of the Palace: “the only part of the Hungarian National Gallery that still preserves something of the palace’s original, 19th-century beauty”.<sup>135</sup> The text includes a presentation of the crypt’s sculptures, including a sculpture of the palatine Archduke Joseph, his sons Joseph Karl and Ladislaus, and his wife Clotilde. The part of the text about the demolitions and the restorations of the Crypt is written in a nostalgic tone with strong respect towards the Palatine and his family: “During the siege of Budapest the Buda Castle was damaged extensively but nothing disturbed the peace of the deceased in the palatinal crypt”.<sup>136</sup> The final phrase of the text suggests the great care

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<sup>133</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://en.mng.hu/about-the-museum/> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

<sup>134</sup> J. M. Bak, *The Hungary of Matthias Corvinus: A State in “Central Europe” on the Threshold of Modernity in “Bohemia”*, 1990, 31, pp. 339-349.

<sup>135</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://en.mng.hu/about-the-museum/> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

<sup>136</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://en.mng.hu/about-the-museum/> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

about their non-disturbance: “thus, twenty-four members of the family are now at rest here, hopefully in everlasting peace”.<sup>137</sup> The special attention attracts the mentioning of the vandalous incident of 1973, when the unprotected Crypt was robbed, and the corpses were taken out of the sarcophagi and damaged. The text also criticizes the restoration works of the 1950s, which is another reflection on the loss of the Palace’s original conditions: “the demolition of numerous old buildings that could have been saved, including the castle chapel”.<sup>138</sup> The strive to preserve the only original room of the palace is manifested by the reference to the 1977-1987 renovation works: “the firm intention of a scholarly foundation to present it to the public restored to its original beauty”.<sup>139</sup> The text about the Habsburg Palatine Crypt has the most space on the webpage, with 3466 characters devoted to it out of 6854 characters of the total text about the Royal Palace and the history of the Hungarian National Gallery. Moreover, it is the most detailed information related to the historical parts of the Gallery. It is clear that the Crypt and the Habsburg family have central significance for the presentation of the HNG’s location and history. The two possible reasons are that it is the only place holding the Palace’s original interior and that it is crucial to highlight the connection to the Hungarian branch of the Habsburg dynasty. The text on the HNG’s location thus incorporates both references to the Hungarian Medieval kings, Matthias Corvinus, and the Habsburg dynasty, all of them being key figures for Hungarian history and nation-building.<sup>140</sup>

The Dome is presented as an iconic part of the Palace and Budapest and a sightseeing point: “The Buda Palace with its characteristic Dome, easily recognizable even from afar is one of the symbols of Budapest. As the highest point of the Palace, the Dome of the Hungarian National Gallery offers an unparalleled view on the capital”. This paragraph crowns the text on the Gallery’s location, and it conveys that the Buda Palace, known for its exterior appearance, is a landmark in Budapest. The only image present on the webpage about the HNG’s location is the photograph of the Royal Palace facade, framing the Dome and the statue of Prince Eugene of Savoy. Buda Palace is a symbolically charged area of the city, an observation that has been recognized in a scholarly community.<sup>141</sup> The website text highlights the significance of the Palace, emphasizing its role as a Royal residence, connecting it to the personalities and historical periods of Hungary, and the present-day function as a home for the Hungarian National Gallery. All these features narrating the HNG’s location underline the placement of the Hungarian national art at Budapest’s most known space with a postcard quality. Authors of two books on the topic of national museums as

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<sup>137</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://en.mng.hu/about-the-museum/> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

<sup>138</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://en.mng.hu/about-the-museum/> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

<sup>139</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://en.mng.hu/about-the-museum/> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

<sup>140</sup> J. M. Bak, *The Hungary of Matthias Corvinus: A State in “Central Europe” on the Threshold of Modernity in “Bohemia”*, 1990, 31, pp. 339-349.

<sup>141</sup> F. Bittenbender, *The role of narratives in the preservation of post-war built legacies in Budapest* in “Territorio”, 2022, 101, pp. 7-18.

institutions used to construct and reinforce nationalism arrived at a similar conclusion when explaining the case of Budapest Royal Palace: a national landmark hosting a collection of national art creates a strong message for national awareness.<sup>142</sup>

### **The Hungarian National Gallery content management analysis**

I address the content website of the Hungarian National Gallery en.mng.hu through a layered analysis. First, I draw the web metrics from SimilarWeb software to understand the website performance and audience. Second, I investigate the content of the website, its organization, the form of the webpages and texts about exhibitions and collections. Then I proceed to the content analysis of the textual data with the word frequency counting and contextualization of the codes. In the content analysis, I address two corpora: the texts of the whole website and the texts dedicated to temporary exhibitions in 2020-2023.

The English language version of the Hungarian National Gallery has a separate URL address, independent from the Hungarian version. Hence, the data relates only to the website content created specifically for audience not speaking Hungarian: expats and tourists. For the analysis of web analytics, this means that the numbers counted for the website en.mng.hu include only the visitors of the English version, which adds greater preciseness to a user portrait, unlike the data from the National Gallery Prague website incorporating all the online visitors of the Czech and English versions of the website www.ngprague.cz. I include the web analytics for the Hungarian version of the website to compare the performances, although the analysis of the Hungarian language website of the HNG is out of the scope of this thesis. However, I believe that the comparison can shed light on the differences between the HNG online strategies for the Hungarian audience and those who do not speak Hungarian.

I collected the web analytical data from SimilarWeb for the website en.mng.hu on 5 May 2023. The data includes the estimates from the full month of January to the full month of March 2023, the most recent data available. The total visits to the Hungarian National Gallery English language website in January-March 2023 estimates at 16185 visits and 5400 visits per month. The website received 5000 monthly unique visitors with a rate of one visit per unique visitor, meaning that people do not tend to visit the website more than once a month and do not make return visits to en.mng.hu. The duration of an average visit is two minutes and twenty-five seconds, and a user usually checks two pages of the website. For the Hungarian version, the total visits in three months are 89263 visits, and united with the English website; it constitutes 105448 visits. It is visible how

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<sup>142</sup> S. Knell, *National Galleries: the Art of Making Nation*, cit.; S. Watson, *National museums and the Origins of Nations: Emotional Myths and Narratives*, New York 2020.

stronger the Hungarian outreach of the website is. The English language website takes only 15% of the total online audience of the Hungarian National Gallery. The monthly visits of the Hungarian website are approximately 29754, with 19380 unique visitors per month and 2 visits per unique visitor. These numbers highlight that the website developed for Hungarian-speaking visitors is more engaging and attracts more visitors compared to the English version. The statistic of the visit duration is also slightly better, with three minutes per visit and three pages per visit.

The geographical distribution of the English language website traffic demonstrates a strong presence of visitors coming from Hungary. Hungary is the country with the highest traffic share, accounting for 27.91% of the overall traffic, which converts to 4520 visits in three months. This percentage suggests a local user base who does not speak Hungarian but stays in Hungary and attends the English language version of the website from the territory of the country. This number includes both expats and tourists. Following Hungary, the United States demonstrates the second highest traffic at 15.61% (2527 visits). The United Kingdom ranks third in terms of traffic, representing 9.96% of the overall visits (1612 visits). The reason for this distribution might be a significant number of Hungarian immigrants living in the USA and the UK.<sup>143</sup> France showcases traffic of 4.83% (782 visits). Lastly, Germany exhibits a traffic share of 3.17% (514 visits). The Hungarian version of the website has the strongest presence in Hungary, accounting for 80.03% of the traffic (71445 visits). The USA is the second most popular location where the website visitors come from, corresponding to the English language version: 3.93% of traffic (3511 visits). However, we can see that the traffic coming from outside of Hungary is decreased drastically, and the local turnout of the Gallery is a fact. The UK brought 3.43% of the traffic (3064 visits). Both the USA and the UK take a central place in the website's geographical presence in the English and Hungarian versions. And the two last countries with the representative number of visits are Romania (1.41%, 1259 visits) and Slovakia (1,21% and 1079 visits). These two countries have a substantial Hungarian minority population.<sup>144</sup>

Most of the visitors reach the website via organic search in search engines, constituting 62.28% of the traffic in the English version and 74.56% in the Hungarian website. Unfortunately, there was no data on social media traffic for the English language version of the website. It is comprehensible as the Gallery does not have English-language social media accounts to attract and direct visitors to the website from there. However, the social traffic of the Hungarian version

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<sup>143</sup> A. Kováts, Z.A. Papp, *Patterns of success amongst Hungarians living in the UK* in "Szociológiai Szemle", 2016, 26, pp. 95-123; C. Brădăţan, L.J. Kulcsár, *When the Educated Leave the East: Romanian and Hungarian Skilled Immigration to the USA* in "Journal of International Migration and Integration", 2014, 15, pp. 509–524.

<sup>144</sup> V. Veres, *The minority identity and the idea of the 'unity' of the nation: the case of Hungarian minorities from Romania, Slovakia, Serbia and Ukraine* in "Identities", 2015, 22, pp. 88-108.



demonstrates that social media bring 1.64% of the total visitors, and Facebook plays a central role in it. Facebook directed 75% of social media traffic, which calculates in 10 visitors per three months coming from the Facebook links. The rest of the social media traffic includes Twitter (15.72%) and Facebook Messenger (9.12%). This data showcases a remarkably low level of social media traffic and engagement. After conducting the web metrics analysis, which provides information about the HNG website's functions and audience, I move on to the management of the website's content, including its layout, structure, and content.

The website content is organized around four sections: Collections, Exhibitions, Visit, and Artworks. The section Collections is dedicated to the presentation of the Hungarian National Gallery's funds, while the Exhibitions tell more about temporary and permanent shows. The section Visit offers information about the visitor services, the Gallery's news and the museum navigation. The Artworks lead to the online reproductions database. The homepage of the Gallery's website features a mosaic-style organization, where the fragments of digitized copies of the paintings. In the left part of the screen, there is a slider that displays a series of fragments with titles. Currently the slider presents two temporary exhibitions (In Search of Lost Times and Gulácsy. The Prince of Na'Conxypan) and a poster leading to the Artworks section, the online archive of the HNG's collections. Other elements of the en.mng.hu include the sections Turning Points, presenting a selection of the gems by Hungarian artists; the section Visit the Hungarian National Gallery with the admissions information; the sections Become Our Friend and MuseumShop; and the section Picture by Picture, leading to a project series posting art historian texts about a selected object from the HNG collection every week. The purpose of the project is to bring Hungarian art outside of the Gallery: "our museum also wants to bring the masterpieces of Hungarian art to those who do not have the opportunity to visit us. . . . We are happy to introduce the history of Hungarian art picture by picture".<sup>145</sup> Curiously, the last update of this series was published on 29 May 2019. Hence, I can consider the project stopped. However, the main page of the website still features it, possibly for its representing qualities and the rich information about the Hungarian art provided there. The bottom of every page of the website includes the banner Subscribe to our Newsletter and the information on the location, the working hours, and the rest of the website sections: News, About the Museum, Affiliated Institutions, Corporate Sponsorship, Event Venues, Sponsors, For Groups, Plan Your Visit, Recommended Mini-Tours, Comfort Services, FAQ, Contact, Professional Services, Privacy Policy, Press Room, Volunteer Program, and Friends of the Museum.

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<sup>145</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://en.mng.hu/picture-by-picture/> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

The three central sections of the website dedicated to collections, exhibitions, and visitor services include some sub-sections providing a structure to the website map. The Collections section in the bar menu on the homepage enlists the collections and the library, additionally offering the link to the online archive and to the Exhibitions web space. The Exhibitions section incorporates the titles of temporary and permanent exhibitions. However, it does not mark which ones are temporary or permanent, which can be confusing for a visitor. The section Visit offers the Plan Your Visit webpage with information about tickets, group visits, museum rules, and comfort services. The other sub-sections of the Visit part include the Programs, the Guided Tours, the Audio Guides, the Friends of the Museum club, as well as a map with the address and opening hours. The Hungarian version of the website has some additional sections dedicated to museum education and extended visitor services. The section Museum Pedagogy is completely missing from the English version. This section offers educational services and events for visitors of all ages, and especially for school children and school groups. Interestingly, the Gallery offers educational sessions for school groups in a foreign language but does not specify which one and informs about it only in the Hungarian language. According to the website text, the mission of the Museum Pedagogy projects is to bring the experience and deeper understanding of art to the visitors: “As museum educators, we work every day to make the time spent in the National Gallery an experience for all ages. . . . We consider it important to be present outside the walls of the museum, which is why we develop countless educational events, entertaining content, and online programs”.<sup>146</sup> The visitors can access many educational events in the Hungarian language: guided tours, and workshops. The Museum Teaching Sessions are developed for children of different age groups, from pre-schoolers to high school students, and there are separate events for teachers.

The online educational materials in the Hungarian version of the website include videos and virtual exhibition space: the selected high-quality reproductions and presented in the form of an online tour, where a visitor can walk the halls, zoom the paintings, and access digitized reproductions complemented with the curatorial texts. Another medium is an online booklet dedicated to a painting and displaying a motion image zooming to the fragments and following the textual narrative. The Gallery offers audio guides and booklets for children available offline. These materials are a part of the HNG visitor augmentation experience strategy, as addressed by the website, to promote independent learning and expand the reach of the Gallery’s educational endeavours.

Apart from the educational programs, the Hungarian version of the website focuses on the family activities at the museum. It offers numerous events tailored for people with children,

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<sup>146</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://mng.hu/muzeumpedagogia/rolunk/> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

including not only guided tours or workshops but also interactive museum walks with the elements of performance and seasonal museum camps where children can learn about art on the basis of complementary educational programs. There is one program available in the Hungarian and English language, the Creative Circle for Children. Family seems to be an emphasis on the HNG website, as the homepage mentions it several times: in the context of summer programs for children, the family guided tours, and the family museum pass as a part of the Friends of the Museum program. Furthermore, there are events not connected to family activities: special tours and discussions to support ongoing temporary exhibitions, concerts, and even yoga classes at the Gallery. During this thorough analysis of the Hungarian website version, I found two guided tours announced in English, which were completely absent from the English version.

The section For Our Visitors with Special Needs is another part missing from the English language website. This section explains the accessibility opportunities for vision, hearing, or mobility-impaired visitors. This omission appears to be even more serious than the absence of information on educational events. The English language Comfort Services section informs about the available portable folding chairs, wheelchairs, strollers, and family care rooms. It does not include information about the services available for the handicapped, despite there being 3D exhibitions and audio guides in English, as well as access assistance for visitors with reduced mobility. Education can be considered complementary to the museum visit, but ensuring access and informing about the access opportunities is a strong recommendation in the international museum community.<sup>147</sup> Lastly, the English language version of the website does not inform about the limited-time exhibition discounts promotion and the program developed to pay tribute to Sandor Petofi bicentenary, the central Hungarian poet. The rest of the website pages, mainly dedicated to exhibitions and collections, are identical.

The section Collections features six collections of the Hungarian National Gallery: Old Hungarian Collection, 19th and 20th Century Paintings, Sculptures and Medals, Prints and Drawings, Contemporary Art, and International Art after 1800. The web pages about every collection follow the same structure: it starts with a top banner presenting a key object from a collection, proceeds to a lengthy text talking about the history and the content of a collection, and then enlists the employees responsible for caring and curatorship. The bottom of a webpage displays previews of other collections, inviting a user to explore more. The section of the Exhibitions does not differentiate between permanent and temporary exhibitions. Hence, to understand which is which, a visitor has to check them page by page. In May 2023, the Gallery

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<sup>147</sup> *Museum education and accessibility: Bridging the gaps*, Proceedings of the ICOM International Committee for Education and Cultural Action Annual meeting, 17-21 September 2015, Washington, D.C. 2016.

has eight permanent exhibitions connected to the collections: Gothic Art in the Hungarian Kingdom, 1300–1500, Late Gothic Winged Altarpieces, Art in the 19th Century, From Delacroix to Vasarely, Nude Sculptures from the Turn of the Century, Variations on Realism – From Munkácsy to Mednyánszky, Modern Times – Hungarian Art Between 1896 and World War II, Shifts – Updated!. The two temporary exhibitions are In Search of Lost Times and Gulácsy. The Prince of Na'Conxypan. The webpages dedicated to both permanent and short-term exhibition also start with a banner with a painting fragment and a title, then display the curatorial text in the left side and up to ten key paintings in the right side of the screen. The permanent exhibition pages separately showcase the most known or important paintings in a section called Highlights, Curiosities and supplement them with short art history descriptions. Finally, all the exhibition pages mention the curators and suggest guided tours and recommended exhibitions. The texts about permanent exhibitions tend to explain the art and the peculiarities of a historical period, as they are organized around the eras or major art movements (e.g., Realism, Modern Times, or 19th century). The texts about the temporary exhibitions focus on covering the central concepts an exhibition was developed around and the biography of artists in connection to their oeuvre. The temporary exhibition texts do not implement a dedicated section about highlights and curiosities. The Gallery uses textual narration and illustration by reproductions as a central form of the website content.

Before I proceed to the content analysis of the website textual data, I conclude that the analysis of the website content of the Hungarian and English versions revealed that both websites equally feature information about the exhibitions, collections and the admission rules. However, the English version does not include a significant amount of information from the Hungarian one. The English version omits a description of the history of the HNG collection, the section on educational opportunities and online materials, the sections on public programs for different audiences, the parts dedicated to family activities, and the section on accessibility. The Gallery develops extensive online discourse for the Hungarian local people presenting numerous opportunities for participation and education for various demographic groups. The English language version simply informs about the ongoing exhibitions, admission rules, and how to reach the gallery. The most recent English language publication of the Hungarian Demographic Research Institute implies that on 1 January 2018, the number of foreign citizens residing in Hungary constituted 162000 people, around 1.6% of the total population demonstrating a persistent growing trend. 50% of the foreign citizens reside in Budapest. Despite the high proportion of ethnic Hungarians who have other citizenship, the implication is that many of the

immigrants are not fluent in Hungarian or do not speak it at all.<sup>148</sup> From this perspective, the dominantly Hungarian language online communication of the Hungarian National Gallery excludes the foreign population of Hungary on the level of cultural orientation and inclusion. It can also correspond to drastically different web analytical performances of the two websites: 5400 online visitors per month and 5000 unique visitors to the English language website, and 29754 online visits, with 19380 unique visitors in a month on the Hungarian language website. Overall, the content of the website of the Hungarian National Gallery demonstrates a strong connection to a local Hungarian-speaking audience both by the web metrics data and the website content, and a significantly weaker connection to the visitors of the English language website, including expats and tourists.

I continue the analysis of the website content with the investigation of the textual data from the Hungarian National Gallery English language version of the website, en.mng.hu. With the methods of word frequency analysis and the content analysis of the themes and context, I address two corpora: the texts from the whole website and the texts about the HNG temporary exhibitions in 2020-2023. The total amount of words on the English website is 69703 words. The top five most frequent words are:

1. Art – 560 words;
2. Hungarian – 542 words;
3. Museum – 436 words;
4. Collection – 345 words;
5. Century – 263 words.

The most frequent word on the website is “art”. This code in the texts articulates the central object of the Gallery’s occupation: the presentation of visual art. Similar to the texts from the National Gallery Prague, the code “art” is an umbrella term to refer to various manifestations of art, and mostly with the meaning of oeuvre or the art of the era (e.g., the 19th-century art and other similar phrases). The categories, including the code “art”, encompass the relation to an ethnic or territorial unity, the reference to an artist, or a reference to an art period or art movement. The category of ethnic or territorial unity has a dominant collocation, “Hungarian art”. However, other collocations are present: e.g., “Ottoman art”, “European art”, “French art”. The category of art of an artist specifies the authors of the artworks. The categories of art periods and art movements

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<sup>148</sup> J, Monostori, P. Óri, Z. Spéder, (eds.), *Demographic Portrait of Hungary 2018*, Budapest 2020, pp. 231-271.

denote that the Gallery frequently includes art historian information on the artworks to place them into the context of the time and the art scene of the era.

The code “Hungarian” is the second most frequent word of the website. One might think that it mostly stands as a collocation “Hungarian art”, nevertheless, this collocation is used only 83 times, and in the rest 459 mentions, the code “Hungarian” is an independent unit. Apart from indicating Hungarian art in general, this code specifies Hungarian artists and artworks in the texts dedicated to the HNG collections. Additionally, this code is repeatedly applied in relation to the history of Hungarian art, standing next to indications of years, centuries, or eras: “Hungarian artworks dating from 1800 to 1945”.<sup>149</sup> Another frequent connection in the category of Hungarian history is the Hungarian kingdom when a text refers to the development of art in the Middle Ages and during the Ottoman occupation. This category highlights the common connections to the past of Hungary in the Gallery’s online texts. Finally, the category of a lifestyle is apparent in the code “Hungarian”. The texts include the denotations of the Hungarian landscape or Hungarian memory. The Hungarian landscape is referred mostly to the Hungarian school of landscape painting, one of the prominent Hungarian art movements of the 19th century. The relation to the Hungarian memory is a way that the texts build the connection for Hungarian art as a representation of the collective memory: “their masterpieces... are examples of the collective Hungarian pictorial memory known to us all”.<sup>150</sup>

The code “museum” stands as a synonym for a gallery in the texts and is mostly used for self-reference by the Hungarian National Gallery. In terms of self-reference, the frequent connection is to the theme of the Gallery’s collection and development, visible in the phrases like “museum has a unique collection”, or “paintings acquired by the museum”. Another category is the reunification with the Museum of Fine Arts when the Gallery explains the process to its visitors. The third category apparent for this code is the Gallery’s facilities, denoted as “museum library”, “museum restoration and storage center”, and “museum shop”.

The fourth most frequent word is “collection”. This code refers to the Gallery’s funds and its content. The two categories that I could extract are the history of the collection and the object of the collection. The history of the collection describes its process of establishment and places the development of art in Hungary into the historical context. The category of objects of collections includes the relation to the number of stored objects and the types of the most frequent artworks: sculptures, paintings, and altarpieces.

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<sup>149</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://en.mng.hu> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

<sup>150</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://en.mng.hu> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

The last frequent code is “century”. This code underlines the repeated relation to the past in the texts of the Gallery, both as a century of an art movement or as an indication of the time period (e.g., the 15th century). This code appears in three categories: the history of the collection, the evolution of the Hungarian state and Hungarian art as a consequence, and in relation to a biography of an artist placing it in the context of the historical period.

The analysis of the texts from the Hungarian National Gallery's website reveals several recurring themes and codes. These codes and categories are interconnected. The Gallery dedicates the English language online space to present the art with its broad scope and the central focus of the Gallery. The code “art” serves as the central and overarching category, closely linked to other codes. The emphasis is put on the representation of the Hungarian component to highlight both the national art, the artists of the nation, the history, and the lifestyle of Hungary. The code “museum” has an institutional meaning and refers to the Gallery itself. It relates to the HNG funds and departments. The code “collection” again signifies the funds and their content, additionally incorporating the history of the art in Hungary. The code “century” underscores the relation to the historical periods. It is interconnected with the history of the collection, the evolution of the Hungarian state and art, and the contextualization of artists within specific historical periods. It can be seen as a second umbrella code of the texts after the code “art”. History and relation to the centuries are the omnipresent themes in the texts about the Gallery development, the collections, and the permanent and temporary exhibitions. These codes and categories are intertwined and reinforce one another, creating a comprehensive framework that shapes the narrative and thematic content of the Hungarian National Gallery's website.

The last step of the website content analysis is the investigation of the texts about the Hungarian National Gallery’s temporary exhibitions in 2020-2023. The total amount of words in the corpus is 11006 words. The most frequent words are the following:

1. Art – 123 words;
2. Exhibition – 84 words;
3. Hungarian – 74 words;
4. Works – 79 words;
5. Collection – 37 words.

Three out of five codes correspond to the most frequent words from the whole website texts: “art”, “Hungarian”, and “collection”.<sup>151</sup> It signalizes that, on the one hand, these themes are indeed central to the website. On the other hand, it shows that the website dedicates most of the texts to the description of artworks and periods and the Gallery’s collection and relates the texts to the Hungarian themes. The most frequent code, “art”, is used in three categories: art styles and types of visual art, the art of nations, and art history. The most apparent is the category of art styles and types of visual art. In the texts, the collocations indicate the objects of an exhibition belonging to a particular style or art movement: “graphic art”, “art deco”, “folk art”, “art nouveau”, and “contemporary art”.<sup>152</sup> These collocations also highlight the themes of the exhibitions in 2020-2023, as the texts about the shows explain in detail its subjects. This conclusion applies to the second category, the art of the nations, as the temporary exhibitions include not only Hungarian art but the artworks coming from other countries. The most apparent collocations are: “Hungarian art”, “Belgian art”, “Budapest art scene”, “international art”, “German art scene”.<sup>153</sup> On the level of temporary exhibition texts, it is visible that the Gallery incorporates the art outside of Hungary and drives international connections to the collections and exhibited objects. Some of the Gallery’s funds include art of the other nations. The spreading practice of the temporary exhibitions is receiving loans from the other countries. In this regard, Gallery expands its focus from Hungarian art to the art of other nations and brings it to the local audience. From the analysis of the website content, I could also see that the Gallery tends to explain more about Hungarian art in the texts about the collections or permanent exhibitions and widen the scope of the objects when developing temporary exhibitions. Finally, the art history category is the third most frequent one. With the collocations “art historian” or “art historical tradition”, the Gallery either highlights the reliability of its texts or refers to the contemporary criticism of the artworks and art movements: “As the art historian Simon Meller later wrote, ‘it was so new and so taken for granted that its epoch-making novelty was not even noticed’” [about Pál Szinyei Merse, one of the central Hungarian artists of the 19th century].<sup>154</sup>

The “exhibition” is the second most frequent code of the website. Obviously, it refers to the shows and uses as a denominator in the texts. The code is used to explain the subject of the exhibition and to repeat the experience of visiting the Gallery by reading the narrative about what one can find in an exhibition hall step by step. The following phrases are used to guide an online visitor: “the exhibition presents”, “the exhibition showcases”, “the exhibitions gradually take

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<sup>151</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://en.mng.hu> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

<sup>152</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://en.mng.hu> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

<sup>153</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://en.mng.hu> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

<sup>154</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://en.mng.hu> [Accessed 28 May 2023].



visitors from... to”, “the exhibition concludes”. Other collocations used with the same purpose is the ones accentuating the central objects of an exhibition: “the focus of the exhibition”, “the inspiration of the exhibition”, “the centerpiece of the exhibition”, “the main focus on the exhibition”. Another category that this code appears in is a valorisation of a show with the phrases like “the most comprehensive exhibition”, “the wider exhibition”, the large-scale exhibition”.<sup>155</sup> The Gallery underlines the significance and the uniqueness of its temporary exhibitions.

The code “Hungarian” drives the connection to the national art, artists, or audience. It refers to Hungarian art movements and often implies that there is a wider international art scene: “Hungarian graphic art”, “Hungarian realism”, “Hungarian symbolism”.<sup>156</sup> This way, the Gallery highlights a national peculiarity of the generalized art styles. The second appeal is to the biography of an artist, who is in focus of an exhibition. The texts either showcase the ethnic affiliation of an artist, or an influence and the connection to the Hungarian art scene of both Hungarian and non-Hungarian artists.

The code “works” is an umbrella code referring to artworks, art piece, and the exhibited objects. It either highlights the content of an exhibition or is used to describe the oeuvre of an artist, enlisting their products and what distinguishes them in terms of the art history and criticism: “most famous works”, “classical works”, “works having sensuality, magic profundity”. Curiously, the often collocation is with the number of works displayed in an exhibition: “forty works”, “eighty works”, and the other numerical expressions.<sup>157</sup>

Finally, the last most frequent word is “collection”, the code referring to the origin and belonging of exhibited objects. This is the only implication of the code. Mostly it refers to the general funds of the Hungarian National Gallery with the collocation “museum collection”. In some cases, it denotes a particular collection: the Collection of International Art after 1800, the Collection of Prints and Drawings, the Contemporary Art Collection.

Overall, through the texts of the selected exhibitions, I can see the detalisation and wider context of the themes applied in the Hungarian National Gallery website. The analysis proves that exhibitions and collections are the central focus of online communication, with most of the textual space dedicated to them. The Gallery uses the narrative of temporary exhibitions to reconstruct the story told in a show and to guide an online visitor through its concepts. Furthermore, the temporary exhibition texts highlight details on styles, artists, and artworks, explaining and describing the objects of an exhibition. The recurring topic in the temporary exhibition texts is the international

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<sup>155</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://en.mng.hu> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

<sup>156</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://en.mng.hu> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

<sup>157</sup> The Hungarian National Gallery Website <https://en.mng.hu> [Accessed 28 May 2023].

connections of Hungarian art and the Gallery. Despite bringing the art of other countries into the scope of the texts, the emphasis on Hungarian art dominates the texts about temporary exhibitions. The code “collection” denotes the source of objects for exhibitions. The texts underline the significance of the HNG collections in developing an exhibition and the role of the Gallery as a holder of collections embodying Hungarian and international art pieces. The valorization of temporary exhibitions is the final element of the narration, with the texts emphasizing the extensive, intelligible, and distinctive material that the Gallery displays. The texts on the temporary exhibitions showcase the Gallery's commitment to presenting Hungarian art within a broader artistic context and with a focus on the connection to Hungary.

### **The Hungarian National Gallery interaction management analysis**

This part of the analysis of Hungarian National Gallery of the website content embodies the website interaction tools and the HNG social media accounts: Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. The website does not offer many opportunities for direct interaction with the Gallery, apart from a subscription to a newsletter program and a subscription to the Club of Friends of the Museum. The Friends of the Museum is a support program aiming to build a community of followers who donate to the Gallery in exchange for such benefits as special events: “to create a dedicated circle of audience for the Museum of Fine Arts and the Hungarian National Gallery. . . . as part of the benefits offered by the Friends of the Museum, you may become a member of an exclusive group who enjoys participating in various art programs. . . . The generosity and commitment of our Friends contribute to the recognition of one of the most important cultural brands in Hungary”. Apart from the benefits, the Gallery mentions the moral satisfaction of supporting a cultural institution and participating in Hungarian heritage development as a motivation to join the Club. It is implied that the programs of the Club will be more participative. The website appears to be more of an invitation to join the Gallery offline than an interactive channel. The Hungarian version of the website is similar in having few direct interaction tools, but it extensively describes the interactive programs and makes a statement about the participatory approach implemented in the Gallery, as I wrote in the analysis of the website content on page 75. The virtual exhibition space in the Hungarian version is an example of an interactive instrument, allowing to discover an exhibition online. The English version of the website has audio guides available online as interactive multimedia. The guides are available for the public, however, only for selected artworks and not in the form of a coherent tour.

The Facebook account of the Gallery has 56000 followers. It supports the ongoing temporary exhibitions and occasionally posts about the paintings from the collection. The average post has 20 likes, and the most successful posts make 600 likes. The comments section is not

frequently used, and the Gallery does not answer comments. Mostly the Gallery uses texts and digitized reproductions in the Facebook content with the rare incorporations of short zooming videos about an artwork or short movies about temporary exhibitions. The video materials receive approximately 800 views. The Instagram account has 20100 followers. Average posts have 200 likes, and most successful posts have 1000 likes. It does not double the Facebook content and develops a separate story. It also supports the temporary exhibitions, but it posts frequent reminders about public events, more pictures from behind the scenes, and some images of the Gallery's halls and visitors. Facebook account puts emphasis on digitized reproductions. On Instagram, the Gallery used instruments Stories (short videos or images disappearing after 24 hours) and Reels (short video clips). These instruments allow to widen the Gallery presentation. The average Reel video has 3000 views, and the most successful one has 10000 views. Curiously, the most successful video was published on Christmas 2022 and was dedicated to *mákoskalács*, a traditional Christmas poppy seed party in Hungary. The Gallery managed to find a relatable topic for its audience and made a good timing, which resulted in an increase in engagement. The YouTube channel has 1190 followers and features short videos and longer interviews with curators or artists. The YouTube channel follows the agenda of temporary exhibitions and additionally features educational videos about the selected artworks from the collection or interviews. The average video has 500 views, and the most successful one has 3000 views. The online channels of the Hungarian National Gallery, the website, and the social media account demonstrate low level of interaction between a user and a Gallery. They are implemented as one-to-many communication media despite the interactive character of social media platforms. The Gallery focuses on developing offline interactive and participatory activities rather than on online interaction.

### **The social role of the Hungarian National Gallery**

The online narrative about the Hungarian National Gallery's social role can be divided into two directions: the presentation and interpretation of art and the educational mission. In the English language version of the website, the first function is presented through the texts on the pages About the Museum, Friends of the Museum, and the texts dedicated to collections and exhibitions. These texts talk about different forms of art mediation that the Gallery chooses: exhibitions, guided tours, development of online content, and online educational content. The text from the About the Museum page directly states the role of the Gallery: "The Hungarian National Gallery is the largest public collection documenting and presenting the rise and development of the fine arts in Hungary". Additionally, this function is complemented online by the website sections Picture by Picture, Turning Points, texts about exhibitions and collections, and the Artworks online archive of digitized collections. These resources not only provide images of the HNG objects but often

supplement them with curatorial texts and wider explanations of the art process. The Hungarian version of the website has more elements presenting the art, the exhibition virtual space being the most prominent one.

The educational function is a natural extension of art mediation as the information created in the process of art interpretation has educational qualities on its own. The English language version, though, does not emphasize the educational possibilities as much as the Hungarian one. In the English version, there are only brief pages about the HNG Library and Professional Services aiding research and providing access to artworks. As discussed before, the Hungarian language website of the Gallery develops a separate section Museum Pedagogy where the Gallery explains its educational mission and many educational events for different demographic groups. It gives access to online educational materials for independent learning. The Gallery also takes a stance on the school and university students by designing special programs for classes and ensuring methodological services for the instructors.

The Hungarian National Gallery's online narrative highlights two key aspects of its social role: the presentation and interpretation of art, and educational initiatives. The English version of the website primarily focuses on showcasing art. The Hungarian version of the website accentuates the Gallery's educational mission and includes a dedicated Museum Pedagogy section. While both aspects are present in the online narrative, the Hungarian version provides more extensive educational resources and program.

### **The designer perspective: an interview with the Hungarian National Gallery**

The analysis of the HNG online channels with a focus on the website content and textual data revealed that the Gallery has strong communication in the Hungarian language and less engaging communication in the English language. The Gallery focuses on the presentation of exhibitions and collections on the website. The social media of the Gallery support the promotion of temporary exhibitions. For the Hungarian-speaking audience, the Gallery produces educational events and online learning materials. The website and the social media of the Gallery are used as one-to-many communication channels and function to inform the visitors rather than interact with them online. The interview with the Gallery's staff brings the perspective of a designer to these conclusions and allows to understand why the Gallery develops online communication this way. The Hungarian National Gallery agreed to a short interview due to the heavy workload of the employees. I conducted a structured interview with a specialist from the Communications Department of the Hungarian National Gallery, responsible for online communication.

The interview questions sent in advance two weeks before the interview. The questions were divided into two groups: the questions on the online strategy of the Gallery and the questions on the performance of the online channels: the website and social media. The interviewee was not able to answer all of my questions, especially the ones concerning the Gallery's normative policies on online communication and the decision-making behind the Gallery's content on the website and social media. However, the interview gave important insights into the motivations behind the online communication of the HNG and the engagement strategies.

According to their answers, the purpose of the online communication of the Gallery is to get engage the visitors and to gain new ones. The main audience of the Gallery is women of the 25-50 age group. The online content is designed with an aspiration to reach people who might be interested in the HNG programs and those who already participated in them to establish continuous engagement. The online communication channels serving these goals are the HNG website, Facebook, and Instagram accounts. For the English-speaking audience, the Gallery develops communication through the website, and for the Hungarian audience, the Gallery incorporates the website and social media. The role of the channels is to promote exhibitions and events, and temporary exhibitions receive more information support. To take control of the channels, the Gallery keeps in touch with the statistics of the website and Instagram. They said that they receive mostly positive online feedback, but sometimes they practice hiding rude comments. The online engaging practices that the Gallery implements are raffles for free admissions and the newsletter subscription campaign on the website. In the raffles, users are required to leave a comment under a publication, and after some time, the Gallery randomly chooses a winner. The comment must meet the requirement to be about either what the user would like to see or which painting from an exhibition they are the most curious about. Usually, these publications receive most of the comments (50-100), and it elevates the social media statistics of an account, allowing it to be more visible or to reach more views. The newsletter subscription program provides extra HNG content to the subscribers. The online communication of the Gallery is supposed to contribute to the HGN mission to mediate Hungarian art for the locals, students, and tourists.

Overall, the opinion of the Gallery corresponds to the findings of the online communication analysis. The Gallery uses online channels to inform users about the events. The main function of an online channel for the Gallery is thus to publish information rather than engage in a dialogue with an online user. The practice of hiding negative comments supports the implication. The engagement practices, such as the raffle and the newsletter campaign, are aimed at an invitation to the Gallery rather than the implementation of online participation just for the sake of it. The online communication strategy is thus to promote the Gallery as a source of Hungarian art and invite

people to visit them offline. The online channels promote the exhibitions of the Gallery and focus on temporary exhibitions. The content analysis of the website texts highlights that the main thematic groups on the website are art, Hungarian art, exhibitions, and collections – all the categories around the funds of the Gallery and the object they display. The remarkable website's stance on the educational opportunities for Hungarian-speaking people is also reflected in the interview when the specialist selectively mentioned that the mission of the Gallery is to reach locals, students, and tourists.

### **HNG website as perceived by international students in Hungary**

The final step of the Hungarian National Gallery is the interview with the website visitors to address the other side of the communication process, those who receive the message. In total, I conducted ten interviews in May 2023. The small number of participants was considered acceptable in line with the other studies that conducted user evaluations of art museum websites.<sup>158</sup> The interviews included international students of the Faculty of Humanities of Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. The participants are from the age group 22-32 years old. Their main occupation is studies in the fields of cultural heritage, history, and architecture. The home countries of the interviewees are in different world regions: Slovakia, Spain, Italy, Georgia, Turkey, Algeria, Nepal, and Russia. The wide geographic representation ensures that visitors from different cultural backgrounds and the same occupation share their opinion on the website. The interviewees, on average, had spent 12 months in Budapest, with some staying only for four months, an academic semester, and some doing full degrees: living in Budapest for already more than a year and staying for two or three years more. Thus, the scope of the international website visitors are not tourists but expats residing in Hungary for an extended period and corresponding to a local audience of the Gallery. All the interviewees do not speak Hungarian fluently enough to participate in Hungarian-language events, and some of them do not speak Hungarian at all. The interviewees accessed the English language version of the website. Three out of ten interviewees visited the Gallery previously, and seven interviewees have never been there. Three interviewees have never heard of the Gallery before the interview, and six participants have seen the Gallery's website or social media. Overall, seven participants were already informed about the HNG activities, and three participants did not know the Gallery at all.

The semi-structured personal interviews took approximately 30 minutes each. At the start of the interview, I asked about the age and nationality and shared the goal of the interview with a

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<sup>158</sup> B. Choi, J. Kim, *Changes and Challenges in Museum Management after the COVID-19 Pandemic*, cit.; I. Lopatovska, *Museum website features, aesthetics, and visitors' impressions: a case study of four museums in "Museum Management and Curatorship"*, 2015, 30, pp. 191-207.

participant. Then the students were asked to freely browse the website of the Hungarian National Gallery starting from the homepage and were given a maximum of ten minutes to do so. The short amount of time was chosen to meet the SimilarWeb analytic data on the website visit duration (two or three minutes on average) but also to give a chance to explore the website a little deeper. I measured the time on my own, and the students did not see a timer so that they would not feel like they were on the meter. The participants were not given any directions on what to look for and were told to visit a website the way they would address any other museum online space. The goal was to replicate a natural visit to the HNG website of an average. It gives an understanding of user behavior on the website and the average acquisition of the website information. After a participant let me know that they were ready and got all the information that they wanted, I would ask questions and record answers on a dictaphone. The questions are available in Appendix 2. The questions are dedicated to four themes: the organization of the website, the content of the website, the function of the website, and the role of the Gallery. The first question was: what attracted your attention first on the website? This question addresses where the website directs the attention of a visitor and what is the central very first piece of information that a user gets to know. The rest of the questions match the units addressed in the online communication analysis: the narrative about the location, the main themes of the website, the relation to Hungarian art, the interactivity of the website, the social role of the Gallery, and the function of the website. Sometimes I would ask extra questions to refine my understanding of an answer or to clarify what a student meant to say.

The overall duration of the visit for eight students constituted about two or three minutes, which corresponds to SimilarWeb data. Only two participants took full ten minutes to browse the website, and I had to stop them after the time was up. Most of the participants had a similar experience with the website. All the participants observed that the banner with a fragment of *Magic* by Lajos Gulácsy attracted their attention first, as it is on top of the page. The banner is dedicated to the current temporary exhibition *Gulácsy. The Prince of Na'Conxypan. The Art of Lajos Gulácsy (1882–1932)*. Then the participants proceeded to check the menu bar, where they noticed central sections on Exhibitions and Collections. The participants were confused about how to differentiate between a collection, a permanent exhibition, and a temporary exhibition. The section Exhibitions indicates temporary exhibitions but does not specify permanent exhibitions. After the participants looked at the opening hours of the Gallery, some of them went by the link to Google Maps to check the location. One participant stopped at this point and explained that it was all that they needed to know about the Gallery in case they would want to visit it: the ongoing exhibitions, the opening hours, and the location. All the participants ignored the section *Picture by Picture*, the most educational part of the homepage. All the participants checked the section *Artworks*, the

online archive of digitized copies of the paintings, and referred to its interactivity: a visitor could tailor the search and zoom the artworks. Five of the participants visited the page Audio Guides and said that it looked like an instrument that can augment their visit to the Gallery. Five students visited pages about exhibitions but did not read deeply into the texts and rather scanned the page and the images. Six students referred to the pleasing visuality of the website and the beautiful design. Three students visited the Become Our Friend page to check what the Gallery offers for membership.

The participants replied that the main themes of the website include Hungarian art and exhibitions. When asked what they would use the website for, the participants replied that for information about Gallery's events and admissions. Only two students said that they see educational potential in the website: to use the information to learn about Hungarian art or to direct other people there with the same purpose. The students answered that they were not able to understand much about Hungarian art from the website. Two participants said that they do not know anything about it even after the website visit, mostly because they did not aim for this kind of information. Five students said that they could see that Hungarian art developed from Middle Ages to Contemporary art and included the major art styles. This observation was based on the section Exhibitions, where permanent exhibitions are organized around historical art periods. Three students said that they were able to see that Hungarian art had different styles and that there were some images, but they did not make an effort to comprehend it deeper. This observation proves the conclusion of the website content analysis that the Gallery presents exhibitions and focuses on Hungarian art. However, it also disproves the effectiveness of the educational potential of the website and a detailed presentation of Hungarian art. Neither of the participants noted the personalities, important artists, or connections to historical periods of Hungary.

When asked about the location of the Gallery, the participants could recall that it is the Buda Castle and that it is a tourist spot. One student referred to the symbolic importance of the Royal Palace for the representation of Hungarian national art. This participant is a student of the cultural heritage program, so it was a pre-biased opinion. The rest of the participants still said that this location is beneficial for the Gallery because it is in a high tourist traffic spot, and the Castle provides a space for the Gallery that connects it to the internationally known Budapest landmark. Two students who have visited the Gallery mentioned that the Castle lost its original interior. The opinions on the HNG location correlate to the hypothesis that the Royal Palace complements the symbolic value of the Gallery's location. However, the strong connection to the Hungarian national narrative was not mentioned.



When asked how they could interact with and reach out to the Gallery, the participants replied about the contact published on the website: the email address and phone numbers. One participant referred to the newsletter subscription program. This observation corresponds to my conclusion that the website is a one-to-many interaction channel that does not provide opportunities for direct dialogue between a user and the Gallery in its online interface. However, four participants shared that they want to visit the Gallery after an interview, which proves that the communication reached its goal.

The participants remarked that the social role of the Gallery seemed to be to present Hungarian art based on the website. The emphasis on education put by the Gallery was not mentioned. The reason is that the English version of the website does not display educational opportunities equal to the Hungarian one. This consideration lines up with my finding that the Gallery focuses its educational initiatives on Hungarian-speaking audiences.

Overall, the interviews with international students aimed to measure the reception of the Hungarian National Gallery's online communication and test the findings of the website analysis, highlight the correlations between both. First, all three elements of the investigation detect that the central focus of the HNG online strategy is the presentation of Hungarian art and the promotion of temporary exhibitions. The Gallery develops online channels as one-to-many communication forms and uses them to inform and invite visitors rather than interact. The website provoked the interest to visit the Gallery offline, meaning that the communication performs its mission. The only missing point from the communication process is the recognition of the educational potential of the website and the HNG offline activities. However, the Gallery itself targets the Hungarian audience with educational events and abandons English-speaking visitors in this perspective.

### **Conclusion on online communication analysis of the Hungarian National Gallery**

In the online communication analysis of the Hungarian National Gallery website and social media, I addressed the following points to drive the comprehensive frame: the web analytics, the website content, the narrative about the HNG location, the content analysis of the website textual data, the temporary exhibitions texts content analysis, the interactivity of the website and social media, and the narrative about the social role of the Gallery. The interview with the online communication specialist of the Gallery highlighted the motivations behind the HNG online communication and details on how they develop their online channels: the website and social media accounts. The interviews with international students in Budapest allowed seeing the end result of the communication and its effects. Overall I develop the case on the whole production

cycle of the HNG online communication by accessing the levels of design, final product, and content consumption.

The narrative on the Hungarian National Gallery location, the Royal Palace in Buda Castle, revealed the symbolic value of the Palace as a place central to the history of Hungary and the Hungarian nation. The landmark location adds to the status of the Gallery as an institution engaging with national art. Additionally, the text demonstrated a sense of nostalgia for the greater past: the powerful Hungarian state in the Middle Ages, the wealthy time of the Habsburg rule, and the historical damages that happened to the original Castle. The narrative showcases the importance of the Royal Palace both as an element of the national narrative and as a tangible heritage.

The online space of the Gallery is constructed around three pillars: collections, exhibitions, and visitor services. The HNG online communication incorporates two separate websites in Hungarian and in English languages. The SimilarWeb analytics detects a crucial difference in the performances of the website: 5400 online visitors per month and 5000 unique visitors to the English language website, and 29754 online visits, with 19380 unique visitors in a month on the Hungarian language website. Both websites have a strong geographical presence in Hungary, telling that most of the HNG audience is located in the country. Additionally, the key locations for the website visitor include the USA and the UK, the countries hosting extensive Hungarian diaspora. The essential themes in the content of the websites embody art, collections, exhibitions, connection to history, and the focus on Hungarian art. The Hungarian version of the website also introduces educational initiatives and takes great effort in explaining and promoting them. According to web metrics data and website content, the Hungarian National Gallery's website generally shows a strong connection to a local Hungarian-speaking audience and a noticeably weaker connection to visitors of the English-language website, including expats and tourists.

The Hungarian National Gallery's website and social media accounts show a minimal amount of user-gallery interaction. Despite the interactive nature of social media platforms, they are used as one-to-many communication tools, in line with the website. Instead of online interaction, The Gallery focuses on creating offline interactive and participatory activities. For online interaction, it leaves the role of informing visitors and presenting the Gallery. The narrative on the social role of the Gallery includes art mediation and education. These purposes are proved in the interview with the Gallery, stating that the HNG mission is to present national art and educate the visitors. The online communication supports these tasks and aims on reaching out to a wider audience and inviting people to attend the Gallery's events.

Overall, the online communication of the Hungarian National Gallery reflects its mission to showcase and interpret Hungarian art while providing access and educational resources to its audience. The Gallery functions as a symbolic yet approachable institution giving visitors a chance to know Hungarian art and participate in the development of the national narrative. The central themes of the Gallery's communication: exhibitions, art, and collections, are keen on presenting Hungarian art, driving the connections to international art, and contextualizing it in the history of the country. Despite the website performance and engagement is low, the online channels manage to present the Hungarian National Gallery and shed light on its focus, activities, visitor interaction, and general online strategy. The website completes its function to inform and invite visitors. However, the educational aspirations are overlooked by the English-speaking visitors, the Gallery still manages to share information on Hungarian art on the very basic level of understanding.

## **Two National Galleries of the Visegrad Four countries: online communication, national representation, and the changes**

The purpose of this comparative chapter is to juxtapose the online communication of the National Gallery Prague and the Hungarian National Gallery. Both the Czech Republic and Hungary are members of the Visegrad Four group, an alliance of the Central European countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia). The Visegrad Four is based on cultural and political foundations. Despite the recent (2022-2023) decrease in cooperation, the alliance has been a dominant contemporary cultural framework in the region for the past two decades, gaining force from 1991.<sup>159</sup> The national galleries and national museums, as heritage actors connecting art and nation, contribute to the development or reinforcement of national narratives.<sup>160</sup> In this regard, I access the conclusions on the online communication of the Galleries from the perspective of not only their institutional function but as part of national representations of the Czech Republic and Hungary. I address the findings deriving them from the elements of the online communication analysis: the narrative about the past and the location, the central themes of the website content, the interactivity, and the social role of the Galleries.

The National Gallery Prague and the Hungarian National Gallery are both keen of telling the history of the Gallery in connection to the history of their nation. The National Gallery Prague presents the past by telling the history of its locations and the evolution of the collection. The NGP relates to the past civic initiatives that stimulated the development of the Gallery: the Society of the Patriotic Friends of the Arts consisted of noblemen and intellectuals, and their predecessors who collected the art were of a privileged position but were not directly connected to power. The rulers, Rudolf II and Emperor Franz Joseph laid the foundations for the state collections. The joint initiatives of the power institutions and civil society spread in history contributed to the development of the Gallery. The eight locations of the NGP have different histories: built by noblemen or merchants, connected to religion, the crown, or the New Czechoslovak Republic. They are monuments of major historical periods correlating to architectural styles in the Czech history: the Gothic, the Renaissance, the Baroque, the Neoclassicism, and the Czech Functionalist architecture. These different locations, united by being landmarks of the city, represent milestones of Czech history. The NGP has decentralized locations and present the past in a neutral tone and with diverse elements. Despite the National Gallery Prague referring to the rule of Charles VI, Bohemian kings, or the role of the state, these references do not take a central stance in the narrative about locations and collections, unlike the Hungarian National Gallery. The Hungarian National

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<sup>159</sup> A. Kazharski, 'The End of "Central Europe"? The Rise of the Radical Right and the Contestation of Identities in Slovakia and the Visegrad Four', in "Geopolitics", 2018, 23, pp. 754-780.

<sup>160</sup> S. Knell, *National Galleries: the Art of Making Nation*, cit.

Gallery emphasizes the influence of the state in developing national museums and art collections. The texts about the Royal Palace, the seat of the Gallery, have a strong narrative about the great Hungarian past: they include the connection to Matthias Corvinus, the detailed description of the Habsburg Palatine family crypt, and the reflections on the Royal Palace's several demolitions and poor restoration practices leading to the loss of the original condition. The Royal Palace is a symbolic and historically charged location. The HNG' presentation of the Palace supports this messaging and connects the Palace to the national art. Both Galleries are attached to landmark locations important to the national histories. However, the presentation of the locations, despite the nationalistic intonation, differs: the National Gallery Prague chooses less intensity, while the Hungarian National Gallery accentuates the direct connection between the past and the present in the history of the nation.

The online communication performance and content are mostly similar for both Galleries. The web analytics showcase a strong presence in their home countries and a close connection to their national audiences: people speaking Czech and Hungarian. The implication is that there can be some part of expats who learned local languages, but the majority of their audiences still consist of ethnic Czechs and Hungarians. The content of the website of the Hungarian National Gallery and National Gallery Prague both focus on the presentation of exhibitions and collections. The volumes of the texts are similar: 69703 words on the HNG website and 79246 words on the NGP website. Table chart 1 showcases the top five most frequent words on both websites.

	The Hungarian National Gallery website	The National Gallery Prague website
1	Art – 560 words	Art – 1604 times;
2	Hungarian – 542 words	Gallery – 958 times;
3	Museum – 436 words	Exhibition – 923 times;
4	Collection – 345 words	National – 851 times;
5	Century – 263 words	Prague – 715 times.

Table 1

Both galleries focus on art, present themselves and the exhibitions, and stress the connection to the national components. However, the Hungarian National Gallery displays the recurring reference to history while the National Gallery Prague illuminates not only the national art but Prague as the capital city and the hub of action. Both websites revealed the high interconnection in the recurrent themes.

The interactive side of online communication is the least developed for both galleries. The two Galleries apply their websites as purely one-to-many communication channels and do not implement direct user-gallery dialogue there. However, the National Gallery Prague showcases

stronger social media usage and the connection between social media and website visits. Hungarian National Gallery does not attract visits to the website by means of social media promotion. The social media of the Galleries serve to widen the content, use the Instagram interface instruments (Stories, Reels), and strive to reach the extra audience by developing additional content. The Galleries implement their online communication with the motivation to inform visitors and invite them to participate in their offline programs rather than to reinforce online discussion. The interviews with the Galleries highlight this function of online communication and prove that the function of websites and social media is to inform and not to engage. In this regard, the websites are successful at performing their central task.

The social roles of the Galleries overlap in the statements that their central occupations are to present national art and educate their visitors. The National Gallery Prague's website is more transparent about its mission: it published the Statute document, and it presents clear judgments on what they do and why it is important for the public. The Hungarian National Gallery does not have any establishing documents on the website, and the role of the Gallery is to be understood by deeply reading the texts. The interview with the online communications specialist became my trustworthy source for understanding the role of the Hungarian National Gallery, and it took eight months to reach the HNG for an interview (September-April 2023). Moreover, the Hungarian National Gallery displays educational opportunities in the Hungarian version of the website and in the Hungarian language, which reduces the accomplishment of an educational mission for Hungarian-speaking visitors and excludes those who do not speak the language. The National Gallery Prague has English and Czech versions of the website equally translated, including the pages about educational initiatives. The National Gallery Prague has a separate Facebook page called NGP for Children, where it communicates the family-oriented programs. In the interview, the NGP Head of the Department of Visual and Digital Communication explained that the Gallery develops online content equally for every target audience (younger people, families, elderly people, and people specifically interested in art) and does not prioritize family programs over the other ones. The HNG more intensively accentuates the attention it pays to families and schoolchildren, while the National Gallery Prague has a more balanced agenda of events for different demographic groups. The HNG has a significant part of its events dedicated to families and children: 21 events out of 48 programs planned for June-August 2023. The other programs include the rest of the visitors and themes (the elderly, the younger people, the events supporting short-term exhibitions). This can be an illustration of the recent reinforcement of conservative

values and family orientation by the Hungarian populist politicians who are a part of the Fidesz ruling party, according to the study by Eszter Zimanyi.<sup>161</sup>

Apart from exhibiting national art and educating the audience, the National Gallery Prague takes on two additional tasks. First, it attempts to provide and develop a space for social reflection and discussion, where people can come to talk, settle a project, and overall make a statement. Second, the related aspiration is to design exhibitions so that they reflect the social climate and become relevant to the audience: discuss the problems that society faces and rethink social changes. I discussed in the interview with the NGP Head of the Department of Visual and Digital Communication this attempt to navigate between the state task to present the national art and the aspiration to do extra and turn the Gallery towards social reflections. In their opinion, it is essential for the Gallery to stay in touch with its audience and keep the relevance to the social changes. In this regard, the National Gallery Prague orients itself towards the newer approach in museology adopted by the current scholarship and professionals and supported by the ICOM.

The online communication of both Galleries can be placed into a frame of the Czech and Hungarian national narratives. The national narratives have been under the influence of the Visegrad Four framework and, in many regards, comply with the political narratives of the alliance.<sup>162</sup> The cooperation developed as a reaction to the Western European ideas of political and social liberalization and cultural inclusion. The Visegrad Four countries have been recognized for anti-liberal political discussion and the traditional conservative framings of the national identity inside the European context despite the superficial conformity to the West.<sup>163</sup> These radical narratives framed the national ideas in the countries, and the national galleries as a representer of national identities mirror the social and political environment.

The online communication of the Hungarian National Gallery is straightforward in this regard. The narratives about the exhibitions, collections, history, and location of the Gallery emphasize the same elements as the Hungarian narrative on the national identity: the conservatism of the texts driving the connection to the strong national past and the importance of national art for the protection of culture. The attention to the family as a holder of traditional values is visible in the online communication. The political preference of the Hungarian culture over the alien cultures can be referred to the absence of a section on educational opportunities on the English language

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<sup>161</sup> E. Zimanyi, *Family b/orders: Hungary's Campaign for the "Family Protection Action Plan"*, in "Feminist Media Studies", 2020, 20, pp. 305-309.

<sup>162</sup> M. Braun, *Postfunctionalism, identity and the Visegrad group*, in "Journal of Common Market Studies", 2020, 58, pp. 925-940.

<sup>163</sup> J. W. Scott, *Visegrád four political regionalism as a critical reflection of Europeanization: deciphering the "Illiberal Turn"*, in "Eurasian Geography and Economics", 63, pp. 704-725.

website.<sup>164</sup> These notions stand in line with the common Visegrad Four discourse on protectionism and conservatism.

The National Gallery Prague, however, is not as apparent in this perspective. As referred by the interviewee, the NGP Head of the Department of Visual and Digital Communication, the state expectation is that the Gallery should preserve and exhibit national art. The texts about the location, history, and collections of the Gallery are clear in displaying the national past but not as charged as the texts of similar content on the Hungarian National Gallery's website. The Gallery tries to take a middle-man position between the nationalist and the universalist approaches. The universalist and the particularist are the two frameworks of the Czech national identity that have been competing since the 19th century. The particularist concept shapes the nation in connection to its unique past and culture. The universalist approach recognizes the nation's civilizational progress and human values.<sup>165</sup> The attempts of the Gallery to reflect on social changes, turn to the people, and change the approach towards the New Museology, the Western mainstream paradigm of managing a museum, can be a sign that the universalist idea of the nation starts to prevail after the post-revolutionist (1968) decades of nationalist self-identification. The recent political changes, the strengthening of the pro-European government, and the 2022 Ukrainian crisis have highlighted the growing Western or universalist orientation of the Czech Republic. This has also been a point where the ponderings on the future of the Visegrad Four started, as in the 2023 political paradigm, the countries take opposing positions.<sup>166</sup>

Overall, the online communication of the Hungarian National Gallery and the National Gallery Prague is quite similar. It follows the purpose of presenting national art and educating the visitors. It works through one-to-many communication channels with a low degree of visible interactivity. It is developed in order to invite the audience to visit the Galleries and inform people about the events. The Galleries manage to show their brand identities and reach visitors through online channels. However, the Hungarian National Gallery presents stronger nationalistic intonations, while the National Gallery Prague appears more neutral and focuses on developing a less conservative approach. These observations correlate to the current challenges in the Visegrad Four group, where the conservative and anti-liberal framework is being questioned by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and the Czech Republic turns to the pro-European side while Hungary balances between Europeanization and conservative populist politics.

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<sup>164</sup> A Örkény, *Hungarian National Identity: Old and New Challenges*, in "International Journal of Sociology", 2005, 35, pp. 28-48.

<sup>165</sup> R. Chlup, *Competing myths of Czech identity*, in "New Perspectives", 2020, 28, pp. 179-204.

<sup>166</sup> G. Bertani, *War on Ukraine: Will the Visegrad Four unravel?*, in "European Student Think Tank", 20 June 2022.



## Conclusion

The conceptual framework of the thesis starts around the idea that media has been influencing museum communication since 19th century. The 20th century presentist change leading to the higher speed of the spread of the information, as well as a 21st century development of interactive virtual environment Web 2.0. require organizations to expand their reach to the audience by the means of online communication. They compete for the attention in a way similar to the market rules: an institution must meet the expectations of an audience to survive and stay relevant. The ideas of the economical theory the New Value Chain have impacted the cultural sector. The New Museology school, with Nina Simon's Participatory Museum, a foundational study, imply that a museum needs to be interactive, approachable, visitor-oriented, and be present online. Moreover, a museum should reflect the social changes and be a place for a dialogue rather than a place for simply showcasing collections. This paradigm has become a mainstream scholarly discourse in the field of museology. However, these notions are rather an expectation than a reality for the global museum scene. I apply the concepts of online communication, engagement, and participation to address the state-of-art of the online landscape in the Hungarian National Gallery and the National Gallery Prague.

In the empirical part of the thesis, I develop a three-layers analysis for the Galleries' online scene. I address the level of the product consumption, the website, through the lens of analysis of website and social media content reinforced by the deeper content analysis of textual data from the website. I dedicate the analysis to the following elements of online communication: narrative about a gallery as a landmark; website content and the textual data; interactivity of a website and social media; narrative about social role of a gallery. These elements draw a comprehensive investigation of the Galleries' online landscape. I study the level of the production by two interviews with the Galleries' online communication specialists to rely my findings on the first-hand source and gain the understanding of the goals, the messages, and the process of the online communication development. Finally, I measure the effectiveness of the website communication in ten interviews with international students in Hungary. The interviews were conducted to comprehend the end part of the online communication process, those who receive a message. Moreover, I place the online narratives of the Galleries into a comparative perspective and correlate them to the present-day social and political climate of the countries within Visegrad alliance. This correlation stands in line with the requirement of the New Museology for a museum to reflect the life. The Visegrad Four political narratives provide the regional framework for the comparison to address not only the Galleries' online landscape but to contextualize it in the

contemporary environment because the galleries function as public institutions and cannot be taken out of the wider context.

The two Galleries', despite choosing one-to-many communication style, manage to comply with the other expectations of the New Museology. They inform their visitors online, they try to build a community, they offer participative programs offline, and develop their educational initiatives. The National Gallery Prague is quite a successful case in this regard, and the Hungarian National Gallery as well. Still, it could have designed an educational section on the website for the English-speaking audience. But the New Museology and the Participative Museum concept consider an idealized visitor. It is implied that a visitor is curious, wants to learn, interested in attending museums, and ready to participate in events. However, my interviews with the international students who are studying history, heritage, art, and architecture, revealed that the audience can be imperfect. Only two students out of ten took their full time to study about the Hungarian National Gallery, located in the city where they live and having a chance to impact their lives. The average website visit corresponded to the SimilarWeb data and constituted about two-three minutes. Moreover, only two students recognized educational potential of the website. Despite the absence of an educational section on the English-language website, the online space still presents extensive texts about the Hungarian art, international art. The Artworks online archive is available for public. Most of the interviewees needed to know the ongoing exhibitions, the opening hours, and the admission rules. If to see through the lens of the New Museology, the Galleries, and the people dedicate less effort to online content design and consumption, as the paradigm expects. There appears to be a gap between the academic expectations, the Galleries' online communication possibilities, and a visitor needs. And if a visitor does not need online participation and extensive online content, then why the Galleries are pushed to improve it? The prospects of the study can be to address the correlation between online promotion and offline visits to a museum or case studies of museums that do not have online communication. How do they reach their visitors and build their identity without online media?

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## Appendix 1

Questions for an interview with specialists responsible for a gallery's online communication.

1. What is the goal of the Gallery's online communication?
2. What channels does the Gallery choose for online communication?
3. Who are the main audiences of the Gallery?
4. What are the Gallery's normative guidelines on online communication: any do's and don'ts?
5. How does the Gallery control online communication?
6. Does the Gallery do the effectiveness evaluation of its online media? If yes, how?
7. What is the feedback from the online users that the Gallery receives?
8. What are the online engagement practices that the Gallery implements in its media?
9. What are the obstacles that the Gallery faces when developing online media?
10. What is the mission of a Gallery and how does online communication contribute to it?
11. What is the role of the Gallery's website?
12. What is the role of the Gallery's social media?
13. What is the message that the Gallery would like to deliver through the website?
14. How does the Gallery decide what information to include on the website and social media?
15. How does the Gallery communicate temporary exhibitions? Is there any difference between the promotion of temporary and permanent exhibitions?
16. How does the Gallery develop online communication for the international audience who does not speak a local language? Why is there no social media in English?

## **Appendix 2**

Questions for an interview with international students.

1. What attracted you attention the first on the website?
2. What are the main themes of a website?
3. What were you able to understand about the national art?
4. How can you reach out to the gallery if you would like to ask something or share an opinion?
5. What would you use this website for?
6. What do you think is the function of the website for a gallery?
7. What do you think of the location of a gallery?
8. What do you think of the role of this gallery for the people?